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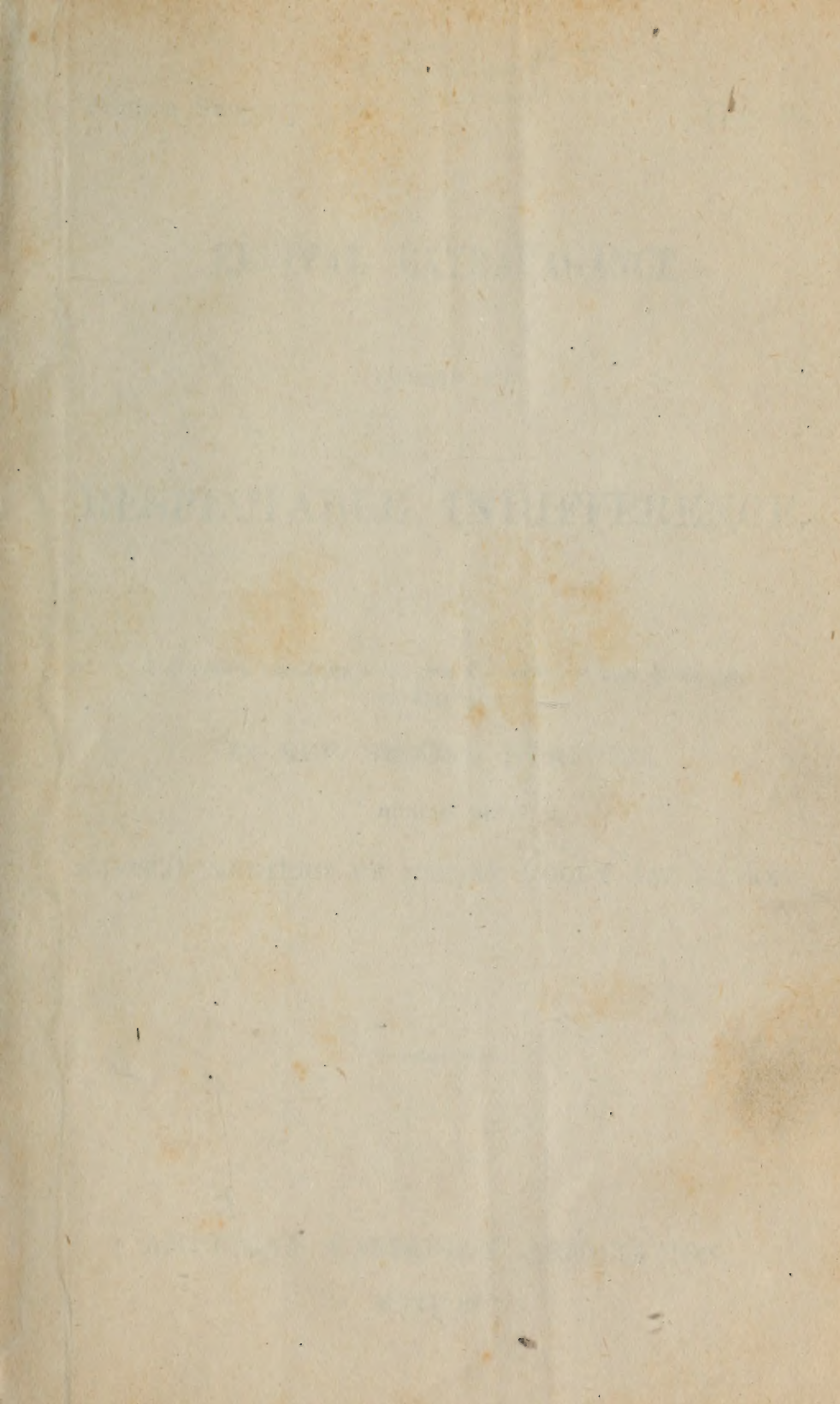


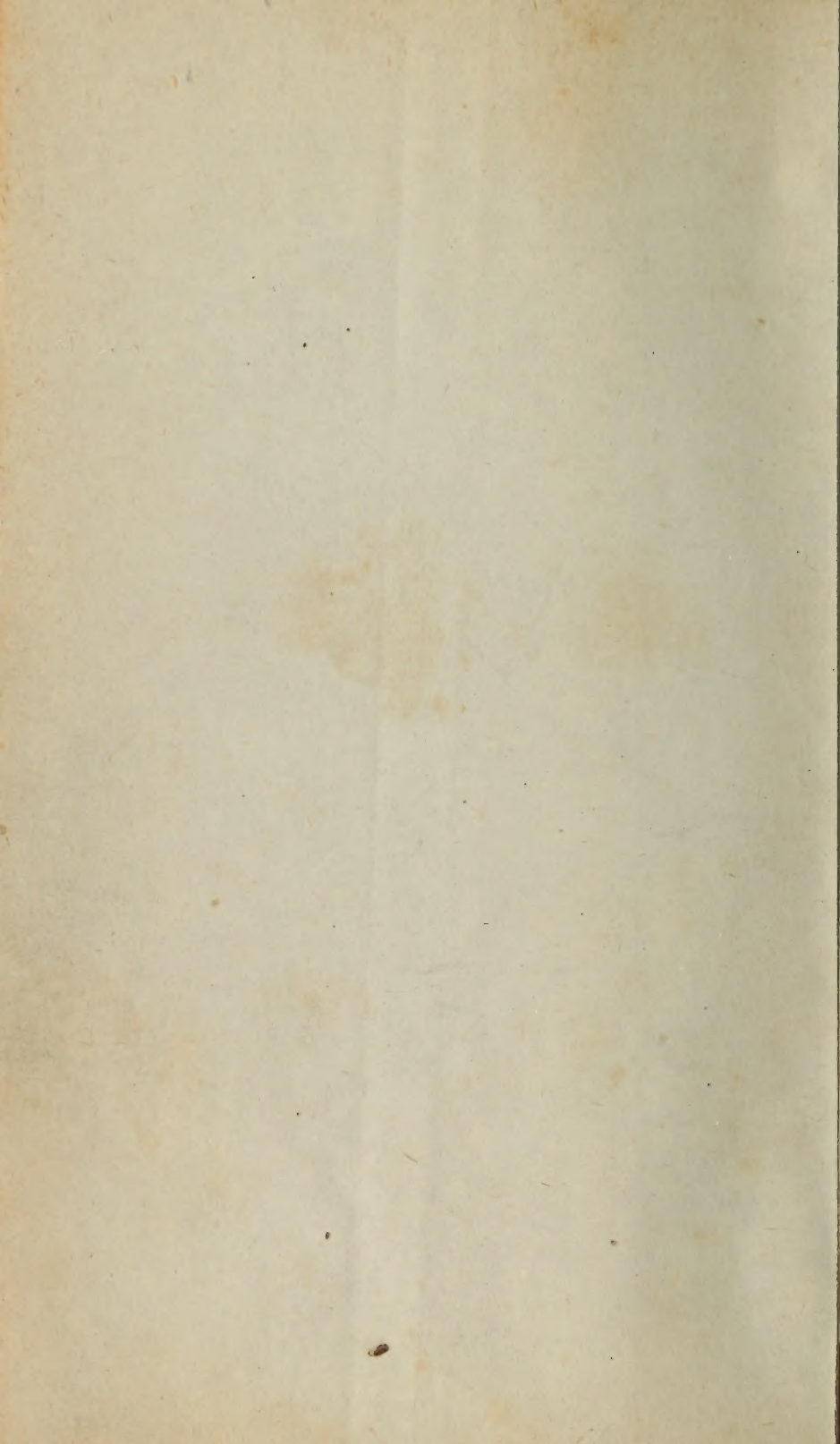
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REVIVAL EXTRAVAGANCE

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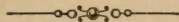
RESPECTABLE INDIFFERENCE.

A SERMON PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH,  
AT CHICAGO,

BY REV. BROOKE HERFORD,

DURING THE

REVIVAL MEETINGS OF MESSRS. MOODY AND SANKEY.



AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,  
BOSTON.



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# REVIVAL EXTRAVAGANCE

CAUSED BY

## RESPECTABLE INDIFFERENCE.

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“The prophet that hath a dream let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? said the Lord.” — JER. xxiii. xxviii.

It has come very strongly to my mind, in the course of testifying against the extravagance of this revival which is now going on, that there is a word which urgently needs saying on another side of the subject. I feel that this revival movement should suggest something else to those of us who have no faith in it, — calls for something else from us besides criticism or protest. Even the fact that the criticism and protest were called forth not by the mere mischievousness of the preaching, but by the vehement denunciation of all who could not so preach, does not lessen the necessity for something more and better. It is always a poor thing to hinder what others are doing — mistakenly, it may be, but still earnestly, — and to offer nothing nobler instead. Especially is it poor when the slackness and inefficiency of the nobler thing is the very cause of the success of that which is less noble. And that is exactly what strikes me about that work which I have felt obliged to speak out against, and which in less public ways so many in other churches have spoken against. This “revival” is not something that stands alone, unconnected with any thing else. It is not so much a cause as an effect, and an effect the real causes

of which lie further back and deeper in than the nominal and apparent ones. Again and again, while this has been going on, people have said to me, "What is the cause of this immense excitement?" Some set it down to the gigantic puffery with which it has everywhere been heralded, which certainly has contrasted curiously with the eager professions of entire dependence on the Holy Spirit! Some attribute it to the gregarious curiosity by which a crowd always attracts a crowd. Some think the secret is in the preaching, and others find it in the singing. I think it lies deeper down than any such matters. It lies in the deep fact that man must have religion; and, if true and noble religion be not within his reach, he is at the mercy of false and ignoble religion! The verities of faith are the grand realities of human life. The soul cannot do without religion any more than the body can live without bread. If it cannot have bread, it will snatch even at husks. If those who know the beautiful, simple, elevating truth about religion do not keep it in its right place before men, — well, for a time the world may ignore it altogether; society goes on as if it were not, and plunges deeper and deeper into worldliness, becomes more and more intensely material. But that cannot last. By and by the higher nature asserts itself again, — asserts itself in a dumb, restless dissatisfaction; craves for something better than it has, or is, and is ready to be carried away by the first vehement fanaticism which stands up and speaks out about these things in plain, unhesitating words and deadly earnestness.

At the root of this whole subject of the revival lies the lesson which it teaches us with such tremendous power, — of the reality of man's spiritual nature and of the religious things which answer to it. Man doesn't live by bread alone. He cannot. There is a whole great life in him that must have something more. The history of man-



kind is teaching this anew every year. It teaches it by the highest life which manifestly is lifted into its pure, strong, beautiful height of noblest manhood by faith; and it teaches it by the great mass of common worldly life which keeps trying, one way or another, to live without faith and cannot. Here is this great, seething life of our mighty American and English cities. When I argue about what religion is to man, I am pointed often enough to these toiling millions and asked, "What is religion to them?" I am told they haven't it. What do they care about the churches? What are the controversies of the day to them? Faith is a sentimental delusion for the leisurely classes; an amiable relic of early training in those who haven't had the unreality reasoned out of them by free discussion, or knocked out of them by life's sternest facts. That is the tone of the *dilettanti* philosophy of the present day, and of the advanced liberalisms that think they have outgrown the past. And they hold their little, intellectual coteries, and settle their mild, supercilious scepticisms according to the latest speculation that passes for science or philosophy, and look pityingly at the crowd that are not so far advanced, and sit, like Tennyson's personification of pure art,

"Holding no form of creed  
But contemplating all."

and think that so "the riddle of this painful earth" is emptied of its divine mystery and everlasting awfulness!

And here come these great waves of religious excitement through society, catching up tens of thousands in the sweep of their fervor, rousing dulled, hardened souls, awaking torpid consciences, touching deeper feelings in multitudes than they ever thought they had in them, making men feel conscience and God and eternity the awful realities that they are, and lifting up crushed and earth-

stained and hopeless hearts into the joy of experiences which, if they are not as lasting as they hope, are yet glimpses of the truer life that might be, that is possible to all. Your little systems are shivered into atoms by the touch of these mighty movements and longings of man's nature. These are the great necessities. You cannot see them. You cannot touch them. Yet, age after age, they keep reasserting themselves as the most tremendous factors in man's being and life; and never do they reassert themselves with more startling power than when, at the touch of some revival movement that seems in itself quite inadequate, they burst forth with a passionate eagerness that may be short-lived, but is intensely real.

The real, wholesome, beautiful answer to this unquenchable craving of the human heart is that religion of Jesus Christ, — Christianity in that holy, loving simplicity in which he himself went about preaching it. But what is to be the witness to men of this religion? It stands in its beautiful holiness and purity in the four Gospels, — and any one can buy those Gospels for a few cents. But is that witness enough? No! No beautiful sentiments on a printed page can speak to humanity at large with the power that humanity needs. Mankind is not saved by books, but by men. I feel to come nearer to the heart of what the apostles meant by speaking of Christ as "the word made flesh," when I see how, age by age, "the Word" has always to be "made flesh;" the high truth, the divine thought, has always to be translated into life, brought out in living manhood and womanhood in order to have its real power in the world. And that ought to be the living significance of all these Christian churches that rear themselves in their calm beauty in the midst of man's eager, hurrying life. They ought not to stand for a dead Christianity, but for a living Christ; and they ought to stand for him, not by the creed they sug-



gest in their name or embody in their rules, but by the spirit which those who uphold them and belong to them are honestly trying to cherish and to live out. There is nothing more beautiful in this world than the idea of a number of men and women, touched by that beautiful, simple, merciful life of Jesus Christ, drawn together by their loving reverence for him, and trying how near they can come to his spirit, and how nearly they can reproduce it. A band of Christian people, touched by the sense of his thought and feeling towards God, and his thought and feeling towards men; coming together, week by week, to try to get a clearer, more realizing sense of that thought and feeling of his; and, in the light of that, looking up in happy worship to the great Father-Life, doing what they can together for that work of saving and blessing the world all about them, and going back into the world's common ways and doings, with purer hearts, and strengthened purposes, and a sturdier hold on duty, and a tenderer, kinder feeling to all with whom they have to do. That is the true idea of a Christian church; that is what every church of Christ ought to mean: that is what this Church of the Messiah of ours here ought to mean, and every church in this great city. What a blessing and what a power, if there were any thing of this kind! I don't say if they were this perfectly, but if this was the main spirit and purpose, if this was the idea that those who build them and those who carry them on, — those at the heart and the head of each society, — really held before themselves and their fellow-members, and tried for with a spirit worthy of such an aim. Could such churches fail of their effect? Chrysostom used to say that "if the Christian church were but for one day what it ought to be, the whole world would be converted before nightfall."

But oh, what a humiliation to turn from these thoughts — and they are the simple truth — of what Christ's

churches ought to be, to think of what they actually are! "Beautiful outwardly." Yes, I suppose there never was a land in which the churches were more richly adorned. Do I object to that, in itself? Not I! I always have maintained that the buildings we raise for our worship of God, and for winning men into discipleship to that great Teacher and Saviour, should be the most beautiful that our hearts can devise, and that it is an object which deserves to be glorified with every thing by which art or music can attract, rest, gladden, elevate the soul of man. But what if the grandeur and magnificence of the churches are only another branch of the ostentatious extravagance which is sapping the simplicity and honesty of modern life? What if these costly structures are erected not for the glory of God, but for the glorification of their builders! What if they are the outcome, not of humility delighting to give the very best and most it can for God, but of pride wanting to outvie the rest of the churches round! What if they are the outcome not of giving at all, either from humility or pride, but of borrowing, what is given being about enough to build a plain, substantial church; and the extra amount that goes for grandeur and adornment, being not anybody's gift, but a great borrowing speculation in the hope that it may draw in a crowd, and be cleared off some time! And what if this cheap, borrowed magnificence, instead of drawing people in, keeps them out, — by making the cost of keeping it up too great for poor or struggling people to take their share in; and, instead of ennobling the church's life, utterly belittles it with a constant worry of care about its debt! I am afraid that it is so; I don't say everywhere, or altogether, but that this element enters into the church-life of this time with a blighting and deadening power. And it is mischievous all round; for it not only keeps out the poor, but it keeps out multitudes who would repel such an epithet, and yet

who do not like to join a burdened and struggling cause ; and, worse of all, it exhausts the zeal and working power that is wanted for simple, loving Christian work, in fairs and entertainments and the innumerable devices for eking out the insufficient funds.

And turn from the thought of the outward temples to the inward church, — the bands of men and women who make up the real churches in God's sight. That is what matters most ! That is what tells most upon society ! And I believe it does tell, to some extent. I do not believe there is a church but has at the heart of it some little band of earnest, true-hearted people, who are ready in every good work, and who do their share twice-told, perhaps, in order to keep this and that good Christ-like work going, the best they know, — the faithful few who are always at their posts, always cheerful and kind, always ready to "lend a hand." But how many are these for all the churches that there are ? And what must be said about the rank and file ? — the people who have never taken hold of religion with any earnest purpose of their souls, never set their hearts right to it ; who are interested in their church to some extent ; want to see it successful ; want to hear it well spoken of in the city ; are apt critics if any thing goes awry, but who have no idea of putting themselves out of the way for it ; who don't begin to know the meaning of self-sacrifice ; who are glad enough to join in church entertainments, but never lift a finger or give up a luxury or a pleasure to help the church's work upon the world.

And how many more are there about our churches who are not even of this much use ! who have some sort of connection with this or that church, — go there when they go anywhere ; or, as is the case with thousands, who never take hold anywhere at all, but now and then, when the humor takes them, turn into some one of the churches



about, — and that is about the whole of it; and yet they would think it very uncharitable if they were told that they were not Christians; and if they are sick they look for Christian comfort, and if they are dying they look to be buried with words of Christian hope. And they are always “liberal,” — oh, yes, ever so liberal; but it is the liberality which comes not of thinking for themselves with earnest freedom, but of not thinking earnestly at all.

Oh, but this religion of Jesus Christ is good for something more than this “respectable indifference”!

What can this do? What can it do for those who hold it so? What can it do for the great world outside, that so sorely needs living light and cheer and help? Why, think of what is round about these Christian churches here in our cities. You are proud of your city, proud of its architectural beauty, proud of its dauntless enterprise, proud of its vast population; — you may well be. So am I! But is that all? Is there nothing that you are not proud of, nothing that, sometimes, as you see it, makes you feel a wondering sadness and a longing that something could be done to make things better? Do you ever pass through those worse and poorer quarters where the wretched, broken-down houses are huddled together, with no trim gardens and no tree-bordered streets? And if you do, does it set you only trying how quickly you can “pass by on the other side,” or only thinking that a great fire would not be an unmixed evil, if it only swept that “poor property” away? Does it not set you thinking what life must be there, — what it must be to the little children, many of them brought up to swear and beg and steal, so few of them ever in the public school; what it must be to the poor women, whom you see here and there, about those shanties, draggled and slovenly, all the sweet grace of womanhood long faded out of them; what it must be to the men, whom, on Sundays, if you will

look, you may see loafing listlessly about? When you see such things, — and they are near enough and plenty enough, if you will only look for them, — does it never cross your mind how Christ would feel about them, if he were here? Do you think he would spend all his leisure riding up and down your avenues or boulevards, and have a seat on Sundays in some high-toned church, and think no more about it? Or that, if his attention were called to all this, he would give ten dollars now and then for some poor mission, and that, perhaps, with a feeling that, really, religion is getting almost too expensive for hard times?

And it is not only for such as these. I am not thinking especially of what the churches might be to the poor. I feel that there is a much larger failure in them than that. I look at the hard, keen, driving life of this great community. I look at the tens of thousands who go down, day by day, into that great fierce race and battle of toil. I think of what life is to so many of these, — such a grim, eager strain; such heavy cares; such weariness, a weariness that at night leaves them with no spirit to read or think, that on Sundays leaves them hardly heart to pray. I think of them as life wears down towards age, and the brightness has faded, and the pleasures have ceased to please; and perhaps success has come, but a success with care and restlessness, and no happy peace at the heart of it. Perhaps success has not come; but only the old, hard, up-hill path for the tired feet, and away beyond all a coming change that may come any day, and which the heart has no joy in thinking of, but rather tries not to think of, wishes to ignore, — but cannot.

I think, in a word, of all the eager, driving worldliness of this time, that I suppose has to be, but that needn't be alone; that might be lighted up, sweetened, made a purer, better thing by the religion of Jesus Christ. It is not one class, nor another class, but the whole life around us,

that wants these old, everlasting truths of God, and the soul and providence, and duty and eternity, witnessing to it with the living earnestness of hearts on fire with faith. But the churches go on in their old, dull way, some of them droning out doctrines that thoughtful men have lost faith in, that no one puts very strongly now, that the living power has gone out of. And others with nobler, larger thoughts only half uttering them, putting the new wine into bottles as like the old as may be. And others again, with perhaps the brightest, clearest truth, content to have it; doing nothing to make it a power; with light, but no heat; with very much respectability and very much indifference! And so the multitude pass by.

All this is what gives the revival its power. Here is this mighty mass of human lives, — with their cares, their follies, their pleasures that don't half satisfy, their eager worldliness, their sins, their vague, fitful thoughts of faith; but, under all, hearts and consciences and souls that are going to live on for ever, and can never quite forget it. Is it wonderful that when, at last, there comes along a man who has nothing of the dull routine of the churches about him; who talks about these grand realities not in mincing, pulpit phrases, but in the downright language of store and street, who is in dead earnest, and speaks in tones of fierce conviction, and who has, at the heart of all, a kind, loving anxiety for every wretched drunkard, or poor, lost child he meets, — is it wonderful that men crowd to hear him? The people can understand him. He makes religion a living thing to them. He breaks down their doubts by the sheer force of his own vehement certainty. He proclaims to them bright hopes which answer to the half longing of many a wakeful and restless hour. He lifts them, if it be for a short-lived ecstasy, out of the dull, unenlightened greed of earthly care. He touches the springs of thoughts and feelings which many have hardly been conscious of since they were children.



Why, then, do I lift a word against his work, some of you may feel inclined to ask. Why? I ask myself that, sometimes. It cuts me to the quick to have to do it, and all the more that I am conscious that his word and work so carry people away, because those who have had truer and better things to say have not said them, or have said them with such slack indifference. But all the same the word of protest has to be spoken. For it is one thing to waken up men's souls, and another really to help and save them. I believe Mr. Moody is wakening up these souls to give them something that will not satisfy, and that has no saving in it. I believe he excites them into a moment of ecstatic glory, which too soon they will find out is not the salvation he persuades that it is, and which will soon leave all but a very few in a more helpless state than they were to begin with. I believe his whole basis of appeal is dishonoring to God and degrading to man, and one which, if the churches suffer themselves to be carried away by the vehement eagerness with which he insists upon it, would put back the whole tone of their thought and work a quarter of a century. So, I dare not hold from speaking. I dare not let the great, bright truths of Christ's own gospel which have been coming into clearer view throughout all churches, be clouded over by this whirlwind of old, worn-out, mischievous superstitions for the sake of the thunderbolt which is undoubtedly at the heart of it.

But, having so spoken about this revival, I feel that I am bound to be doubly plain and faithful in speaking henceforth about the duties of every Christian church and all Christian people. I think it has never come to me so strongly before, what a blessing to men that simple, practical religion, as Jesus Christ himself preached it and lived it, might be, — aye, how awfully needed it is, and how the silence and indifference of those who hold it leave

men at the mercy of every vehement zealot even of the poorest superstition. I would that my voice could reach all those who hold the more liberal and reasonable faith in other churches besides ours, and yet who, from love of peace, let the old errors stand for the only way of salvation and make no sign. I know that there are numbers of such people. I do not believe that there is a church, even among those that most pass for "evangelical" and "orthodox," and that stand firmest for the "ancient ways," which does not include people who no more believe those old schemes of doctrine than I do, and who, in their own thoughts, just hold for the simple Christianity of the Prodigal Son and the Sermon on the Mount. I appeal to these to be more outspoken. The time is come when your openest word is needed. I do not ask you to speak out from my standpoint. Speak out from your own, — only *do* speak out. You speak your liberalism in closets when it wants telling from the house-tops. You are speaking of it just enough to clear your own souls, when it wants speaking out loud enough to help other people's souls. Let those who still believe the dreams of the old creeds, preach them; but "He that hath my Word, saith the Lord, let him speak my Word faithfully."

And I would fain speak to those who have kept aloof from churches altogether; who hold very much this simpler faith — this thought of the great Father-Life, this appreciative trust in human nature, this large, charitable hope for the life to come, — but who have, perhaps, found no church that has seemed a worthy embodiment of it, and so have never joined themselves with any. I urge you to quit this fruitless isolation. You will not find any perfect church this side heaven. No; but band yourselves with those who seem to you the nearest to the truth as far as you see it, and the openest to see more truth. Perhaps you do not think they can help you



much; well, help them; strengthen their work; throw yourself heartily in among them. Why, the liberal faith should be the strongest of all to-day, if only those who hold it, more or less clearly, would all join heartily together, and make it a living power and help it on.

And now, my final word to you, my fellow-members of our own church. I ask you to take these thoughts at heart. Ask yourselves if we have been all that — with this broad, manly freedom of ours, and this strong, simple Christianity — we ought to have been. Ask yourselves how far these words I have been speaking about the respectable indifference of the day are true of our church. Ask yourselves what we are doing to make our Christianity a strong, happy reality among ourselves and to those outside. Face the truth and fact about this, in the solemn light of that great need and craving and preparedness of society which this revival has revealed. And may God, who has given us the light of our faith, touch our hearts with the fire of it, that so our church-life together may be kindled into that warm, happy glow which, week by week, may make it good to us to meet together, and which may shine out through all our word and work into the world of doubting, struggling, care-worn, tempted souls with something of the spirit of the Master's invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

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[No. 3.

# HUMAN NATURE

NOT RUINED, BUT INCOMPLETE.

BY

REV. C. C. EVERETT.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

BOSTON.



CAMBRIDGE:

STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON.

## HUMAN NATURE NOT RUINED, BUT INCOMPLETE.

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BY REV. C. C. EVERETT.

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Two theories of Human Nature are often expressed, neither of which is wholly true, and neither of which is fully believed, even by those who have adopted it as their own. One of these theories is that human nature is wholly evil; the other is that human nature is wholly good and perfect. One explains all the evil in the world by the utterly depraved natures of the individuals who make up society; the other explains the sins of the individual by the evil which he finds embodied in the outer world. To the one, each separate life is a turbid stream, polluting the fair earth; to the other, each new life is a fountain sweet and pure, whose waters will soon become polluted by the mire through which they flow. Neither of these theories is fully believed. Those who insist most strongly on the total depravity of human nature, we find recognizing, in actual life, the native virtues of the soul; while those who insist on the perfect purity of the individual nature at its birth, recognize differences in character, and original predispositions to certain faults or vices. Neither of these theories can be wholly true. If man is wholly evil, whence the good that is in the world? If man is

wholly good, whence the evil? The doctrine of the total depravity of man, indeed, confutes itself. If it is my nature to do what we call evil, then it ceases to be evil. The lines of Dr. Watts suggest a truth that may be applied to every sphere of life. We say, —

“Let dogs delight to bark and bite,  
For God hath made them so;  
Let bears and lions growl and fight,  
For 'tis their nature too.”

We call a man sinful in proportion as he lives like the beasts; but if that is his nature, if God has made him so, it ceases to be sin. It is a well-known fact, that a large part of this continent, as well as of Europe, was once covered with glaciers. Scientific men formerly attempted to explain this accumulation of glacial ice, by showing how a period of intense cold might have been brought upon the earth. The colder the earth of the past, the better, they thought, they understood this glacial action. It is now known, that, in such intense cold, no glacier could have been formed. Heat is needed to cause such an accumulation of vapor from the ocean, that, when it congealed, it should settle down in these almost inconceivable masses. A wholly evil nature cannot sin, more than a wholly cold world can produce glaciers. There is needed within the nature a principle or a possibility of goodness to make sin possible.

If we leave our theories, and look at the world as it is, we find good and evil side by side; we find even the germs of good and evil side by side, in every individual nature. Our problem is to understand the relation in which these two elements stand to one another.

When we look more closely, we find that all virtues stand in a certain connection with one another. Together, they form a perfect whole. Each is needed by all the rest for



their completeness; and each needs all the rest, or it is imperfect. We can conceive of an ideal man in which all virtues exist, each in its true proportion, and together form a beautiful and complete unity. This possible perfection and harmonious co-existence we see to be the plan after which human nature is shaped. This completed plan is what we strive to realize in our dreams, our romances, our loves and aspirations. We cannot conceive, as was just stated, of a being wholly evil. We can conceive, and cannot help conceiving, of a being wholly good. There is thus the trace of plan and system in the goodness, while the evil is only the imperfection and interruption of this ideal plan.

The question now meets us, Is this perfect nature, of which we can trace the imperfect and scattered elements, ruined or incomplete? When we see these scattered human virtues, of which no life is wholly destitute, and which, in spite of sin and wrong, ennoble the world, are we looking upon the ruins, the broken arches, the crumbling pillars, of a past perfection; or are we looking at the broad foundation and uprising columns of a perfection that is yet to be? According as we take one or the other of these views is our thought of humanity sad or hopeful. To many, the grandest exhibition of human virtue can be only sorrowful. It can remind them only of the greatness of their loss. If a fragment is so fair, what must have been the original magnificence? Not merely do they wander among ruins; these ruins are blasted by a curse. It was the bolt of the wrath of God that scattered the fair structure; and whatever remains, however beautiful at first sight, is yet scarred by the mark of his anger. To others, the virtues of human life have a grace and a joy that are not in themselves. They are not merely lovely: they are the prophecies of the grander loveliness that is to come. The world is to them

no ruin blasted and accursed. They see the city of God slowly forming itself out of the chaos; and they see, above all, the smile of God's blessing.

We can determine which of these theories is true, only by considering the arguments upon which they rest. The belief that human nature is a ruin, blasted by the curse of God, rests upon the story of the fall of man, as it is related in the book of Genesis, and supported by the traditions of other nations, that speak of a golden age in the distant past. What is the element of human nature, from which springs the tendency to this backward-looking glance, by which individuals, as well as races, turn so often with sad longing to their early years, we need not here inquire; neither is there a necessity for examining the authority of the passage in Genesis to which reference has been made. The incident of the speaking serpent, and of the formation of woman from a rib taken out of the side of Adam, would seem to remove this narration from the sphere of literal history. The name of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" — a tree which grows only in the gardens of the soul — would seem to imply that the story was not originally intended to be received as historic fact; while the yielding of Adam and Eve to the very first temptation would show that they could not have been originally very different from the weakest of their descendants. The Greek legend of Pandora is commonly related, as if Pandora brought, in a chest, to man, all the evils of life. The genuine legend was different. Man, it relates, had all the evils of life locked up in a box, from which they could not escape. Pandora persuaded him to lift the lid, and they came forth, and filled the earth with grief and terror. Such is the true conception of the fall of man, in contrast with the one commonly held. The heart of man was the sealed chest, which contained all sins and woes. Temptation could not

bring them. It could only persuade man to lift the fatal lid. The story of the fall has a sublime truth and significance; but its truth does not lie on the plane of history, and its significance does not concern the hard facts which mark the beginning of the development of the human race.

For the belief that human nature is not ruined, but incomplete, we have the unvaried testimony of history, so far as history has traced the course of human development. History is, indeed, and always will be, imperfect. It has not reached, and probably never will reach, the beginning of the life of man upon the earth. But, so far as it has penetrated backward, it has found itself tending towards the savage or barbarous state; and the earliest traces of human presence are the traces of savage or barbarous life. Even the book of Genesis, which describes the fair beginning of human history, shows traces of a preceding polytheism. Its very words, the words put into the mouth of the Creator himself, are half-converted heathen. The conception is monotheistic; but the language, "Let us make man in our image," is polytheistic. This is not the place for historic detail or discussion. I know the mystery which broods over the first life of man upon the earth. What agencies of creation or of elevation were at work, it is not for us, at present, to say. It is only a flippant conceit that can give unhesitating judgment. We can only say, that, so far as known facts can be laid hold of, the history of the human race has been a progressive one. We can take this for a certainty; while the assumption of a fall, from the effects of which this progress is a slow emerging, is purely hypothetical, and may be left out of the account, until we have some historical ground to sustain it.

If it be true, as history represents, that the race of man is progressing from a state of savage and barbarous



life to a life of love and knowledge, to the refinements of civilization, and to the inspiration of Christianity, we have a satisfactory solution of the great problem of the mingled good and evil in life. We should be prepared to find all the wrong and the violence that we do find. From half-civilized savages what more could we expect? The law of hereditary descent, which is elsewhere so powerful, cannot be disregarded here. We find even in our household pets traces of the wild life of their remote ancestors; and we must believe that only very slowly would the tendencies inwrought by ages of barbarous life be eliminated from the very structure of the race. Then, too, our habits of thought, our prejudices, our habits of feeling, our forms of government, our literature, our theologies, are all of the past. Each generation has its successor in its training, and it has been so from the beginning. Very slowly, then, can humanity have moved along its way. Moreover, as this elevation of the race, and of the individuals that compose it, depends upon a moral purpose; whenever this purpose is temporarily missing, there will be a lapse, a sliding-back, so that the ground won will have to be won over again. This is the disturbing effect of sin in human history, — of sin which is the close-following shadow of freedom.

It will be seen that this is no rose-colored view of human nature. It recognizes all its faults, its vices, its sins. It recognizes the hard selfishness which forms so great an element even in our most advanced society. But it recognizes also the virtues of humanity. It has a place for all the flashes of nobility and of self-sacrificing heroism, which have glorified, at however rare intervals, the history of every race. It has a place for those individuals who seem to us perfect, who are themselves the prophecies and the exemplars of the coming completeness of that common

nature of which they are partakers. It has a place for the scattered and often hidden beginnings and hints of a better nature, which we find even in the most depraved. Still more, it recognizes the royal claims and bearing of virtue, wherever it appears, and the homage which the lowest and the vilest pay to it. Virtue does not appear upon the earth as vanquished or dethroned. Its dignity is not traditional, due by courtesy to its past supremacy. Virtue, wherever it appears, feels itself young and strong, the heir of the world; and men recognize, by a certain instinctive prescience, the reality of its coming power.

We need hardly ask, whether the belief that human nature is a melancholy ruin of the past, or that it is indeed as yet incomplete, but sublime already with the grandeur of its coming perfection, falls in best with the tendencies and instincts of the present. The theory that human nature is a ruin might have been believed, indeed, among the corruptions that marked the period when the Roman Empire was tottering to its fall, and men fancied that the world itself was hastening to its end. It might be believed, perhaps, even now, in the old world, where tradition still controls the lives, if not the hearts, of men. It might be believed at other periods in the history of the world; but in this nineteenth century, in the midst of the untrammelled thought and the fresh springing life of this new world, such a doctrine can have neither place nor power. It lies athwart the course of all the ideas and principles which mark the present. Faith in man is the form, which, in the present age, faith in God pre-eminently takes. Men once fancied that they honored God by degrading, in their thought, the nature of man. Now men can find no better way of honoring God than by recognizing the traces of the reflection of his perfections, however faint and scattered, in the human soul. All the great movements of the present

rest on this faith in human nature. The world is slowly becoming democratic. In remote nations and in divers ways, we find, the principle of democracy is becoming more and more the ruling power. In this nation, it is fully recognized in theory, however imperfectly in fact, as the one central and fundamental principle; and democracy can have no other basis than faith in human nature. Even the church in America, which involves the most delicate and the loftiest relations of the soul, rests upon a popular basis. No matter what the professed belief of any church may be; when it throws itself, fully and unreservedly, upon the people for its support, it shows that it has faith in the people, in those religious instincts which are its only firm foundation, in that love of the highest which seeks to embody itself in outward form and service.

This faith in human nature is not merely faith in what it is, but still more faith in what it is to be. The only basis of reform must be the belief, that what can now get a footing, however slight, will hereafter stand on a foundation which cannot be shaken. You leave your boat on the sloping beach, just where the ripples of the ebbing tide can lap, though they cannot float it. Do you not fear that it will be swept away? You know that the waves, which now just float about it, in a few moments will not reach it; that they will sink away, and leave it every moment further inland. Such confidence do we have in whatever embodies the purest principles of right. If it can obtain a foothold, we are secure. The wrong and prejudice that threaten it, that almost sweep it from its foundation, we know will recede in an ebb that will be succeeded by no flood-tide, and leave it, not merely unmoved, but unthreatened.

The belief, that human nature is not ruined, although as yet incomplete, involves the fairest promise of the future. When we look backward only, we might feel proud of our



attainments: when we look forward, we are humbled. The mountain-side is not half scaled. When we look down, we grow giddy with the height that we have reached; but when we look up, and see the summit as far removed in appearance as if we had not begun to climb, our dizzy pride leaves us. The philanthropy, the science, the civilization, of the future will excel ours, as ours does the past. Compare Christianity with Christ, and you will see the difference between the Christianity of the present and that of the future.

The truth we are considering applies to the individual as well as to the race. The most sunken soul is not a hopeless ruin; the loftiest is not yet complete. Channing seems to us a perfect man. Yet Channing drew his strongest faith in immortality from the prophecy of completeness, contained in the unfinished plan even of his own being.

Who does not feel within himself like hints of what he might be, but is not? What character can we become familiar with, which does not give us hints of what it was meant to be, but is not yet? Even from what we see, we can guess at the ideal which that particular character is meant to reach. Or, when we cannot find this in ourselves and others, we find it in our thought of Jesus. It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that we shall be like him. Let us, then, strive after the highest and the best. Let us take nothing less than Christ himself for our pattern; knowing, that, though our natures are imperfect, they are not deserted by the loving inspiration of God, and that we are meant to grow up, in all things, unto Him who is our Head.

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# JESUS AND HIS CRITICS.

By C. A. BARTOL.



AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,  
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## JESUS AND HIS CRITICS.

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CRITICISM of Christ's doctrine or position has usually spared his moral character. But we must not wonder at its reaching *that* ; for a critic is a jealous man. A critic has been called a truncated poet, as a vessel with her top-masts cut off is a razeed ship ; and while it is the valuable function of criticism to discriminate and point out error, it may have no capacity to comprehend truth. Beware, in being critical, lest you be censorious ! Christianity and its author are proper subjects of criticism, if we bear in mind they cannot be put within the compass of our understanding, and require imagination, affection, sympathy, and moral sensibility, before we can approach to take their gauge. In vain we try to measure any thing or person ; the smallest fact being constituted by its relation to the infinite in this wonderful, indefinable, and inexhaustible world. There has always been dislike of identifying human development with the Christian name ; and it is notable that the most recent revives the earliest criticism of Jesus, — namely, that he was insane, had a demon or devil ; and when many of the Jews added, He raves, or is mad, they summed up the whole indictment against his moral character, of being both crazy and heady, — which is still brought. M. Rénan, the French scholar, who has written a sentimental biography of Jesus, calling it his *life*, with all the learning and grace of his

work, proves, perhaps, as running in his light French blood, an incompetency to appreciate the sublime Hebrew in those qualities too high for any dancing spirits to reach, while also too grave for any gay literary sparkle to set off; and American talent must do something more and better than borrow the pencil of Gallic genius to make a portrait that will stand of the grandeur of him who was at once Son of God and Son of man.

M. Rénan says, that the man Jesus, who was God only so far as he showed the divine image, grew less in going on, the stream of his worth and being narrowing toward its close, while we know it is the property of a great mountain-fed and sky-fed river — Amazon or Missouri — to widen at its mouth. The implication is, that we have here no chief martyr or supreme hero. But real greatness or goodness grows more and more. Socrates surely waxed to the end. The last days of Buddha were his best. Mohammed refined as he went on. It is the law of character in the course of providence to improve, to slough off mortal defect and infirmity, to bear the test of trial and be glorified, to run like gold clear of dross from the furnace, and so to vindicate the way of God with His servants before the eyes of mankind; and, if Jesus was an exception to this law, it seems so far a demonstration that he was of inferior temper or base metal, and not one of the royal few. But, as I think, it is the criticism and not the subject that is at fault; and what alone the criticism proves, is it not lack of the deep soil needful to root the seed the Master sows? What but the fruit with ripened cluster is the branch's appreciation of the vine? We shall never estimate the excellence into which we do not grow; and as to this supposed and surprising diminution of our Lord as he advanced into the thickening shadows of his shortening career, neither fact nor text bears the critic in his assumption out. How un-



natural for a man to diminish and decline, who was but a little over thirty years of age when he died! while the very philosophy of history would be accused of mistake if a dwindling current, like that of those water-courses lost in the desert sand, could have so miraculously opened afterwards broader and richer than the Nile, and Arethusa-like, to fructify two thousand years since in the expansion of mankind: it were a violation, indeed, of the law of cause and effect.

But Rénan and his copyists stand quite apart from the multitude of fair commentators and wise judges in this view, which is not justified by the record itself. Dr. James Walker, a cooler head than Rénan's, and naturally more sceptical, while as studious and rational for a longer term of years, declared, as did the artless evangelist of Christ's boyhood, and John the Baptist of his manhood, that Jesus increased and spiritually grew. He thought that the scourge of small cords for the cattle and traders, which the doubtless warm-blooded Nazarene made at the beginning of his ministry, he would neither have woven nor wielded at the end. Certainly none did he weave or wield. And if there be a sombre color in the great prophet's mien amid the closing scenes, if there be denunciation of hypocrisy or prediction of doom, a cloud hanging over Gethsemane, and a shadow, which the dim sun conspired with, darkening the earth from the cross, — for what should all this be cited but in evidence of a more solemn conviction as well as declining worldly fortune? Surely not, against all the indications, does it argue hope extinguished or a virtue that failed! What does virtue consist in, for its origin or issue, but the persuasion, for its first purpose and final resort, of a just retributive award, — a persuasion which to him was a perpetual thrill? What is hope but appeal beyond all calamity, such as Christ lifted first and last to God?

Beside, if a stream does sometimes — like the Danube or Saguenay — contract as it proceeds, hemmed in by hill and crag a hundred or thirty hundred feet high, it deepens, too, like the cañons in Colorado, or as that strange northern Canadian tide does in places near half a mile for the line to fathom, where the boat cannot be anchored, but must be moored to a tree on the bank; while the Euphrates and Mississippi grow shallow as they grow wide. The multiplied river-mouths prove not depth. So, will Rénan, or any follower or imitator of his, tell us if they have sounded the feeling of Jesus in the garden beneath Calvary, where *he* was hemmed in and could no longer spread smoothly through Galilee as a smiling field? In his profound emotion, in his bloody sweat of supplication, I think he was greater — not less at that point, the terrible gorge and ragged cleft of his lot — than when on the mountain he taught or prayed, or in the boat across the lake he sailed, or by the well in Samaria he sat with the woman and talked, or walked that pleasant Sunday, heedless of fences, through the corn and plucked the ears, or enjoyed even more than *they* did his own benediction on the babes; for who could not with incomparable transport delight in *that*?

A touch of lunacy was there as the action became intense, and proceeded to culminate in the tragedy of his life? Well, Paul, taking that superficial Governor Festus's idea of the matter, was beside himself; and Socrates, by his own confession, had a demon for a check; and George Washington in a certain battle was exalted above himself; and Stephen had a hallucination, did he, when he saw the heavens opened? and Moses was a fool, idiot, or pretender, when he met the Lawgiver of heaven and earth amid the lightnings of Sinai? Is not everybody crazy to-day who erects a higher standard than the market, and calls to a purer life than the custom of the world? To

be great, to be holy, is to be moon-struck and mad! No: I find sanity where the critic finds insanity; and not the seer or saint, not Jesus or Peter or John Brown; but we slaves of custom, tools of ambition, victims of bad habit, and devotees of gain, worshippers of mammon,— are in the wards of the asylum, not of brick and wood, for the weak-minded, while we seem to tread the ample space. I doubt not some crazy folk are near by now! “*Where is the hospital for the demented?*” one asked the patriot Pettigrew, in Charleston, when South Carolina was seceding. “*You cannot go amiss,*” answered the sage and level-headed, even-voiced old man: “*it is everywhere here now!*” What the critic calls insanity I call the grand climacteric of the Master’s life.

But Christ was over-excited surely; his mother’s temperament was too much for him, and bore him off his feet into ecstasy, till he lost his footing altogether in what the critic characterizes as his *diatribes*, towards the conclusion of his career, against sinners, Scribes, and Pharisees? I ask, in answer, is there no room for earnestness, no propriety in being stirred? Is composure a stagnant pond? Is tameness balance of mind? Is a pool a truer sign of health than the rolling and foaming sea? In a murky, breezeless air is there better poise than in a thunder-storm, or the bracing, wholesome wind? If unrippling stillness and unruffled calm be the signal and manifesto of human perfection, I say, let us have no perfect men! Away with them all, with their spurious claims! A perfect man *so*, in this world of need and error, where every thing cries aloud for change, progress, and reform, were an annoyance, a nuisance, and bore! Christ’s own disciples have hurt the real type of their Master’s character by making it too humble and meek; as his enemies have maligned, by saying it was not humble and meek enough. Is Nature bewitched, off her decorum



and off her guard, in the electric blaze and clap, — such as lately startled Boston to its feet, — by which she purges the foul accumulation in winter, and summer's sultry heat? No more is the human soul, when raised, as in Christ, by conscience to the highest power, — it flashes and rattles through the unwholesome and corrupted social sky. Do not modern radicals and reformers thunder too, or ought they not? It may be thunder of the theatre, and not of the sky. So far from wishing to take out those chapters of woe on liars and hypocrites, with a view to improve the narrative and present the great preceptor's face nice and smooth, as of one sitting for his portrait or photograph, regular and unimpassioned as an engraving in an album, I think such abstraction of motion and heat would be a fatal injury to the picture. Motion and heat were the glory. The sun's light comes of its heat. According to the great philosopher Leibnitz, creation is no statue or passive daguerreotype, but a perpetual motion, as we see. It is a series of *fulgurations* or thunderings from the source of power and right; and the man who is most god-like will never be posing for his likeness, or looking anywise at his shadow; he will not glance over his shoulder after critic or spy; he will not be always at his ease in a professor's chair, or locked up in a minister's study, or standing in an artist's studio, or walking in Plato's Academe: but out of doors and among men, watching and providing for the human weather, teaching and warning with his *Indications*, prescribing duty and foretelling consequence, though the temple tumble in all its stones, and Jerusalem be destroyed.

If Christ's feeling grew warmer, it grew nobler; and it was no selfish humor. Witness his bidding the disciples sleep on and take their rest the Gethsemane-night! Witness his prayer for his crucifiers on the more terrible morn! Witness, if his own will for a moment gave way

at what he called the cup, it gave way, as sooner or later must all our wills, to the will of God. His patience before Pilate, his silence under false accusation, were toward the last of his life. Do they prove the dwarfing? No wonder he has been deified by the fond votaries of his church! What apotheosis of Greek sage or Roman emperor was ever so deserved? He would reign but to serve, and, like God, to bless. Yet this incarnate image of his Maker was a man, whose honor the so fond idea of miraculous conception only stains, immaculate as his birth or begetting doubtless was. Are we all spotted because begotten and born? This *man* we Liberals in religion will not give up to any Romish, English, Congregational, or Episcopal monopoly. He is ours too. He belongs to Independent, Freethinker, and Dissenter, as much as to Orthodox or Presbyter.

Will the critic say that in all this I am speaking not of Jesus, but the *Christ* or *Messiah*, the predicted *Anointed* and *Sent* Jesus has been converted into,—a myth fashioned or constructed out of the real man? I answer, the transformation implies somewhat to be transformed, which we must give an account of. What sort and how much of a *man* did it take to make the sort and size of *myth*? A great shadow can be cast only by a great substance, as night is the shadow of the planet. All the worlds that roll and shine in the firmament exude their atmosphere from their solid stuff. Even the comet has a nucleus for its splendid tail athwart the sky. An actual rock or ship is lifted so grandly by the mirage. Other men — Abraham, Jeremiah, Washington, Lincoln — are, or are to be, myths, after their measure, in the love and reverence of mankind; and Jesus is no exception, save that his superior personality makes a wider and more lasting reflection, fetches a louder and sweeter echo from the human soul. So I say to the critic, Distinguish and discriminate his properties, and

give him, if you can, his true place in history, past or to come; but why belittle a great man? Are great men so plenty we can afford to throw them away? You do not try to belittle Homer, Shakspeare, Alfred, Milton, Cadmus the Phœnician, or Columbus the Genoese. You talk of Jesus as *disappearing*! You do not ask *them* to disappear; and he will not vanish from the mind's eye, go away from his followers' mortal sight, so long ago as he did, that he might not overpower or stand between and eclipse God. Free Religion, so called, will not displace Christianity, until, beyond notions and words, it show a higher than the Christian character. Fine persons will prevail over fine abstractions. I admire talents; but goodness is the greatest talent of all. Men may be radical, and also very low!

But, does one inquire, What is the Christian religion but a tradition taking the place of the fresh inspiration we need? I reply, Surely the same Spirit as of old lives and works and speaks. It is not dead or dumb. But our homage is for what it has been and done already. Our love of our race is for what it has been and done! In the boat of humanity, containing more than Noah's ark, we have arrived thus far on the stream of time. Could you cut off the stream behind, the boat would not go on, but go down by the stern. Only the flow far back, even from the eternal Fount, enables her, and us in her, to move on another inch: and we will not throw over the chief pilot still on board till we can pick up a better on the way; for He that steers and guides also feeds. I saw a cloud of hundreds on hundreds of sparrows yonder, and I marvelled what drew them so together on the street, till I saw one scattering crumbs from a doorway. Human creatures have assembled, and still meet, in the name of Jesus the Christ; for what reason, but that they have from his hand the bread of life? By a law of nourishment and sub-



sistence, — a law of individual and social and civilized man, however the critical and metaphysical observer in his watch-tower of lonely observation may fancy himself above it, — the condition of the race, from Russia to the United States, by this Christ-Ideal has been lifted and sustained, like the continents, by a central force of fire above the level of the sea: Jesus, in his humility, like a strong man stooping to raise a heavy weight, having taken hold of and elevated the world. As, when America or Europe rose from the primeval flood, all the shores and zones as one thing rose together, so mankind in all its tribes rises at once, — such a religion as ours being not the only exalting power, yet a main motive with the rest that co-operate. The critic says, the figure of Jesus has to be painfully *excavated* from the record of the past. But he will please excuse us from his digging; for to the Christian believer this great Leader is no buried statue, as on the Tiber or Po; and no fossil remain, but a living form, outlined with purity, instinct with love, and in a holy imagination moving and walking still, with no survivors that are too good or that need be too proud to follow in his steps. As to this past, whose annals we think so long, what is its memorial but a speck, a pin's point, in the geological and astronomical time of which no register remains? I profess to you that every so-called *ancient* worthy I read of, reflected in the mirror of my mind, appears not behind, but before me; and on the circle of the eternal dial One that was lowly and lordly at the head.

Long is the procession before and behind; long before, *because* it is long behind! He that cuts off his past cuts off his future. Christianity is not all! but it holds of the long future, because it holds of the long past; and anti-Christianity, rooted in a thin soil, is a fruitless tree. Humanity — that larger thing than any form of religion, yea, greatest of all we know after God — is no metaphysic phan-

tom or doctrinary phrase. As an entity, it is part of Divinity. As a sentiment, it is acknowledgment of what mankind is and has been ; and, in what human nature has accomplished or achieved, not the least has sprung and ripened from the Christian Faith.

*Religion of nature!* What but religion of the *Spirit* has unfolded and unveiled nature's face ? Because we are unspiritual, nature is not learned from and loved as she should be. So Wordsworth wrote :—

“ Little we see in nature that is ours :

It moves us not. Great God ! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that might make me less forlorn,

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.”

But this the critic calls mere *sentimentalism*. Nay, he might as well so brand all poetry, and all nature in man or God. Rather it is true and pious owning of what is good, as a vital kernel in the worship of the past, out of which springs adoration for the present and coming time. Let us gather it up from the first lisp, when mankind as a child was learning to say its prayers, to the last articulation ; till heathen or Christian shrine or altar end in the “ no temple,” because all is temple in heaven !

1st Series.

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OUTLINE

OF THE

TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

AGAINST THE TRINITY.

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BY HENRY WARE, JR.

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BOSTON:  
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.



THIS Tract is taken from an Address delivered in 1827, before  
the Unitarian Association of York County, Maine.

## TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE, ETC.

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WHY do we not believe the doctrine of the Trinity? Because it is not the doctrine of the Bible.

This is our reason. Not because the doctrine is a *mystery*—that is, if you mean by mystery something which we cannot fully understand or explain. This circumstance may create a difficulty in many minds; but notwithstanding this, if we found it testified to in Scripture, as an unquestionable and essential doctrine, we should not hesitate to believe it, any more than we hesitate to believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, or that God foreknows all things, and that yet man is a free agent. We only ask for PROOF that it is taught in the Bible. We have looked for it, and do not find it. *We do find that God is revealed to be ONE, but we do not find that he is revealed to be THREE,—*neither three “persons,” nor three “subsistences,” nor three “distinctions,” nor three “somewhats;” for each of these words has been used to explain the doctrine. Therefore we cannot believe it.

*That God is revealed to be One,* is a proposition which I need not stop to prove; for no one denies it. It would be consuming time to no purpose to quote passages in support of it.

I therefore pass to the other proposition— *We do not find in Scripture that God is revealed to be Three.* This is the doctrine opposed to our faith, and which it is necessary for us, in upholding the truth of the Bible, distinctly to disprove. In doing this, we make our appeal to the Bible; and may He, who blessed man with that precious volume, aid us in so unfolding its testimony, that we may “speak concerning Him *the thing which is right.*”

We refer principally, in this brief outline, to the testimony of the New Testament. If it appear that this is decidedly against the doctrine, it is enough. No one will pretend to prove it from the Old Testament alone. If Jesus and the Apostles deny it, no one will think that Moses and the Prophets assert it.

I. *The terms which are necessary to the very statement of the doctrine, and which cannot well be avoided by those who hold it, are not found in Scripture.* The words Trinity — triune — Jehovah-Jesus — God-man — are not in the Scriptures. We nowhere find the expression *God the Son*, but always the *Son of God*; nowhere *God the Holy Spirit*, but the *spirit of God*, or the *Holy Spirit*. The expressions first person, second person, third person, three persons, are not found. Now if the very words, which are necessary to express the doctrine, are not in the Scriptures, how can we suppose the doctrine itself to be there? If the sacred writers meant to teach this doctrine, how is it possible they should not sometimes have used the words which are now used in regard to it?

II. *The doctrine of the Trinity is nowhere stated in ex-*



*press terms, while that of the sole divinity of the Father is taught in language the most explicit and direct.*

There are only three texts which speak of the Father Son, and Spirit in formal connection, and neither of these declares them to be three equal persons in the Divinity. Now is it possible this should be the case if the doctrine were true? Is it possible that the Apostles should never name them together but three times, and then not speak of their being one God?

Indeed I am wrong to say that there are *three* texts; there are only *two*; for one of the three passages to which I referred is well known to be no part of the Bible;—namely, 1 John v. 7. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.* This verse, everybody knows, was not written by St. John, but has been added to this epistle since his day. John wrote in Greek; but the old manuscripts of the Greek Testament do not contain it. It is found only in the Latin. It has therefore no right to a place in the New Testament, and ought to be rejected. It is rejected by all impartial scholars of every denomination, who have inquired concerning it. There are therefore only two texts which formally name the Father, Son, and Spirit in connection with each other.

The first is the form of Baptism, Matthew xxvii. 19 *Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Here the three are placed in connection. But observe the mode of expression. Does it say that they are three persons? No, it does not say that they are persons at all. Does it assert that they constitute one God? No. Does it say that each is

God? No such thing. Does it say that they are all equal? No such thing. Does it say they are all to be worshipped? No. *Then it does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity.* If it neither declares them to be three persons, nor equal to each other, nor each to be God, nor each to be worshipped, then it does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity.

The same is true of the other text, 2 Corinthians xiii. 14. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* It is not here said that each is God, nor that all are equal, nor that all are to be worshipped, nor that all together constitute one. Therefore it does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Nay, it virtually denies it. For, as you observe, it does not speak of the *Father, Son, and Spirit*, but of *Jesus Christ and God and the Holy Spirit*. Observe the difference, and consider what it implies. Would a Trinitarian express himself in these words and in this order, when intending to express his doctrine? If it were *Father, Son, and Spirit*, we should of course regard them as three and not one, unless expressly instructed to the contrary; how much more when the words run, *Jesus Christ — and God — and the Holy Spirit*. So that there is only one text which unites the term *Father, Son, and Spirit*, and that one says nothing of the doctrine of the Trinity. Now I ask seriously, if it had been intended to teach that doctrine, is it possible that this should be the case?

It is thus plain that this doctrine is nowhere taught in express terms. You then say, it is perhaps taught indirectly and by necessary implication. I answer, it is impossible this should be, because the doctrine that

THE FATHER ALONE IS GOD is taught in *the most direct and absolute terms that language will admit*; so as positively to put out of the question every other doctrine, and to take away the liberty of inferring any other from indirect expressions.

That this is so, may be seen at once from a few plain and explicit texts, which seem to be perfectly decisive.

(1.) John xvii. 3. *This is life eternal, that they might know THEE, THE ONLY TRUE GOD — and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* This is the language of our Lord himself in prayer. Now that he was *at prayer* proves that he could not be God — for God never prays. But besides this, he strongly asserts that the Father *only* is God. It could not be asserted more strongly. It *never has been* asserted more strongly.

(2.) Mark xiii. 32. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven; NEITHER THE SON; but the Father.* This is the language of our Lord. He declares that he does not know the time of that day and hour; that the Father only knows it. Therefore the Father only can be God; for God knows all things.

(3.) 1 Timothy iii. 5. *There is one God — and, one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* What can assert more positively than this, that Jesus is not the one God? If not, then there is no Trinity.

(4.) 1 Corinthians viii. 6. *But to us there is but ONE GOD, THE FATHER, of whom are all things and we in Him; and ONE LORD, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by him.* This text is very positive. It declares that Jesus is our Lord; but that the Father only is our God. Can language be devised which shall declare it more positively?



(5.) Ephesians iv. 5, 6. ONE LORD, *one faith, one baptism*, ONE GOD AND FATHER *of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. What can the Apostle mean by this separation of our Lord from the one God and Father of all, if it do not intimate the Father's complete and unrivalled supremacy? What words can speak it, if such words as these mean any thing else? Has it ever been asserted, by any Unitarian, more unequivocally?

I ask, then, seriously — in the fear and presence of Almighty God, and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord — whether these five POSITIVE, EXPLICIT assertions that the Father only is God, ought not to set the question at rest in our minds? While we have these plain and intelligible declarations of the divine word — which never have been, and never can be, made consistent with the doctrine of three equal persons in the Godhead — ought we to be turned from our faith by any arguments which might be drawn from more obscure passages? Ought we to take up the opposite doctrine, because it may be ingeniously inferred from difficult and controverted texts? Are we not bound by these plain declarations? And while they stand in our Bibles, uncontroverted and unrefuted, shall it be said that we reject the testimony of God, and depart from the oracles of truth? For myself, so long as the glorious doctrine of the Divine Unity is built upon these FIVE SACRED PILLARS, I must confide in it as the truth of God. If the Holy Oracle can announce any truth plainly and unequivocally, it has so announced this. To my ear it speaks in language the most unambiguous and the least susceptible of perversion. While I abide by it in these plain texts, I know what I believe; I have the sure word of truth. If I for-

sake these, and attempt to reason out another doctrine from more difficult passages, I am not sure that my reason may not deceive me in the process, and lead me to wrong conclusions. I am safer therefore to abide by the testimony inscribed on these Five Pillars, which I can read as I run.

III. As these fundamental texts most plainly teach the supremacy of the Father, so there are *equally decisive texts respecting the character and offices of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit*, which go to confirm it. Let us attend to these.

1. Let us consider, first, *the language which is commonly used respecting our Lord Jesus*. Is it such as implies that he is the same with Almighty God? Take his testimony respecting himself. — “I came not to do mine own will.” — “I can of myself do nothing.” — “The Son can do nothing of himself.” — “The Father that is in me, he doth the works.” — He calls himself, “he whom the Father hath sanctified and sent.” — He says, “I am come in my Father’s name.” And after his resurrection he says, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” — Ponder these expressions; weigh these words; and say whether they be the words of one who would represent himself as the independent God.

Take the testimony of the Apostles. “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, by signs and wonders which God did by him.” — “Appointed to be a Prince and Saviour” — “at the right hand of God exalted” — “made both Lord and Christ.” — Because of his obedience unto death, “God hath highly exalted him and

given him a name above every name." In the end he shall "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all." Weigh these expressions deliberately, and consider whether it be possible that they should be used concerning Almighty God. Yet such as these are applied to Jesus in every part of the New Testament.

Consider the terms of faith in him which were required of his disciples. Were they such as implied his supreme divinity? Remember the confession of Peter, — "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" — and with this Jesus was satisfied. Remember the confession of Martha — "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God;" — and he required no more. Remember the reason which John gives for writing his Gospel; "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Who does John say is born of God? "Whoso believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." Who does he say overcomes the world? "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." What was the preaching of the Apostles? Look through the book of Acts, and you will find the burden of it to be, "Reasoning from the Scriptures and testifying, that Jesus is the Christ." Now is it possible, that, in all which is thus said of the necessity and value of faith in Jesus, — when believers were to be received into the church and their immortal interests were depending — is it possible that they should not have been required to believe him the Almighty God, if he were so? Would he and the Apostles have so solemnly assured them that faith in him as the *Son of God* was sufficient, if in truth he had been *the very God*?



2. The same conclusion may be as decisively drawn from *the language perpetually used respecting the Holy Spirit* — language, wholly inconsistent with the idea of a divine person distinct from the Father, and equal with him. The Spirit is said to be *poured out* — *shed* — *given* — *given without measure*; men are said to be *baptized* with it, *filled* with it, to *partake* of it. But this cannot be said of a person. It signifies evidently, in such passages, a divine influence; an influence which may descend from the person of the Father, as well as from some distinct person. God does not become another person, because he gives his Spirit to men. When Paul visited Ephesus, he found certain Christians there, and asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost. They answered, *we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost*. How is this? The Holy Ghost a person in the Godhead, equal with the Father, and essential to salvation to know him, and yet these disciples never heard of him? Impossible — and therefore impossible that it should be a third person in the deity, distinct from the Father, and equal in power and glory. No — the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. Paul tells us what it is, when he says, “As no man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him; so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God.” The Spirit of God is God himself, just as the spirit of a man is the man himself. It is no more a separate person, than a man’s spirit is a separate person. Thus the supremacy of the Father remains unaffected.

3. There are also *many expressions respecting Jesus and the Holy Spirit in connection with each other*, which confirm the evidence that the Father alone is God. It

will be sufficient to cite these without comment ; since the mere reading of them will show how utterly irreconcilable they are with the idea of three persons, alike equal and supreme. “ God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.” — “ Jesus received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.” — “ God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” — “ He that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by the Spirit that dwelleth in you.” — Consider what each of these passages must mean if the doctrine of the Trinity be true, and you will perceive them to be utterly irreconcilable with it. Each of the sentences quoted speaks of God, of Jesus, and of the Spirit ; and this in such manner, that, if each be God, they express a meaning which is absurd.

IV. Thus far we have looked at the testimony of Scripture as exhibited in particular classes of texts. We may now turn to some considerations drawn *from the general style of the New Testament*. Here we shall find that the doctrine of the Divine Unity so pervades and gives a complexion to the New Testament, that if we could conceive the doctrine of the Trinity to be true, it would alter the complexion of the whole. It would not be such as it is, if that doctrine were true.

This may be partially illustrated from the devotional character of the New Testament ; from the conduct of the disciples toward their Lord ; from the conduct of the Jews toward him, and his disciples ; and from the controversies of that age.

1. Look at *the devotional character of the New Testament*. If the Apostles worshipped God in three persons,

it will so appear in their conduct and writings; this circumstance will characterize their devout expressions everywhere. And this the more especially, because they were *Jews*, — a people who worshipped God with a strict and most jealous regard to his unity. They could not have changed their practice in this particular without the change being most strikingly observable. Yet we have no intimation of such a change. They appear to have gone on with the worship of the One God of their fathers, without any alteration. Look at this fact. When Paul was converted, he must have passed — supposing the Trinity to be a Christian doctrine — from believing Jesus a blasphemous impostor, to believing him the Lord Jehovah. Is there the least hint of such an amazing change? He speaks with admiration and rapture of the new views and feelings which he enjoyed with his new faith. But all the rest together was not so astonishing and wonderful as this particular change. Yet he nowhere alludes to it. Is it then possible that it could have been so? that so great a revolution of feeling should have taken place, and no intimation of it be found in any act or expression? He speaks frequently of his prayers. And how? “I bow my knees unto the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” “Blessed be the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” “Making mention of you in my prayers, that the *God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory*, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom.” It is plain therefore to whom Paul directed his worship. His epistles contain many doxologies and ascriptions of praise to God. And in what terms? Always to One person, God the Father. And *not once*, either in his epistles, or in any other writ-



ing of the Bible, is a doxology to be found, which ascribes praise to Father, Son, and Spirit, or to the Trinity in any form. This fact is worth remarking. The New Testament contains, I think, twenty-eight ascriptions in various forms; and from not one of them could you learn that the doctrine of the Trinity had been dreamt of in that day.

Honor is doubtless ascribed to the Saviour in terms of gratitude, love, and rapture. It could not be otherwise. How could they, who had seen him, avoid it, when we, who have not seen him, are constrained to love him, and through our faith in him to rejoice with joy unspeakable? Ascriptions of gratitude and honor to the Saviour, who will not render? But this does not prove him to be the Almighty God. When the company around the throne are represented in the Apocalypse as uttering a new song of blessing and honor and glory to *Him who sits upon the throne*, and to the Lamb, it never can be understood that they attribute divinity to the Lamb; much less that he is the same being with him who sits on the throne,—for he is standing *in the midst of the elders*, and is praised because *he was slain*. This is not a description suitable to God. And thus while the New Testament overflows with warm expressions of reverence and gratitude toward Jesus, it is as to the *Son* of God and it reserves all supreme worship for the Father. Jesus himself worshipped the Father. The language of the Apostles was, “Giving thanks always to God, even the Father, through Jesus Christ.” And when honor to the Son is spoken of, it is distinctly stated that it is “*to the glory of God the Father.*”

Such is the devotional aspect of the New Testament

—an aspect which it could not possibly present, if the disciples had practised, and meant to teach, the worship of God in three persons.

2. *The manner in which the disciples conducted themselves toward their Master*, is a certain proof to the same point. Conceive that they supposed him to be Infinite Jehovah, the God of their Fathers, whom they had been adoring from their childhood in the strong and awful reverence of the Mosaic worship; and could they have lived and conversed with him freely as they did? Could Peter have rebuked and denied him — Judas betrayed him — and all forsaken him? Impossible — perfectly impossible. Their whole intercourse with him must have worn a wholly different complexion. It is not in human nature to have lived with one whom they knew to be God, and yet to have conducted themselves as if he were not.

3. The same thing may be said of *the conduct of the Jews toward him*. If they had supposed him to be the God of their fathers, is it possible that they should have treated him with violence and contempt? If they did not suppose it, yet knew that he *claimed* to be such, and that his Apostles so regarded him, they must have looked upon him with horror as the highest blasphemer. And would not this have sometimes appeared? This is a very strong point. When he was accused before their council, and the charge was blasphemy, they were evidently at no small straits to support the charge. The only evidence which they could at last adduce was, that he had said he could raise up the Temple in three days. Now if he had ever claimed, in any way, to be Almighty God, or had given any intimation that he desired to

be so considered, would they not have remembered it against him at such a moment? When they were eager to seize on the most trifling circumstance, when they sought long for false witness before they could find one; is it to be believed they would pass by such a charge as this? And as they were entirely silent concerning it, is it not certain that he could never have made any such claim?

Nothing can be more decisive than this consideration. Yet it may be corroborated, if not strengthened, by adverting to a remarkable incident in his history. Some of the Jews, on a certain occasion, took up stones to stone him. He inquired the cause of their violence. They answered, "Because thou, being a man, makest thyself God." To this he replied by a positive denial, and by a full explanation cleared himself of the charge, saying that he claimed to be only "the Son of God." After this they seem never to have repeated the accusation; — not even when they were ready to take unfair measures for his condemnation. And yet, strange to say, this explanation, which satisfied his enemies, has not prevented his followers from still insisting to repeat the charge which he refuted — that he, being a man, made himself God.

4. *The conduct of the Jews toward the disciples after their Lord's death*, proves that *they* knew nothing of the Trinitarian doctrine. They were active in establishing a new dispensation of religion, and thus drew on themselves the obloquy, abuse, and persecution of their countrymen. Wherever they went, they were assailed by the Jews with outrage and violence. They were accused of speaking blasphemous words against the holy place



and the law; of turning the world upside down; of designing to overthrow the religion of their fathers; and were scoffed at as followers of a master who had died the ignominious death of a malefactor. But they were *never accused of worshipping him, or preaching him as God.* Amidst all their enemies' accusations—about the fairness of which we cannot think they would have been very scrupulous—they never brought forward this. And yet, in the eye of a Jew, it must have been the most hateful thing in their system. To teach that that Nazarene enthusiast, whom they had despised and slain, was the very God whom they had always honored and worshipped, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!—nothing could have so excited them against the new religion and its active propagators. Yet it never formed the ground of their opposition. Is it not therefore certain, that the Apostles never held such a doctrine?

5. Of the same nature is the following argument. There arose several controversies in that age, especially with those Jews who had been converted to Christianity. Some of these are treated of in the Epistles. But it is very observable, that amongst the questions which thus arose and required explanations from the Apostles, there is no record of any question or controversy respecting the Object of worship. And yet, if the new religion was adding two new objects of worship to that of the old, this would have been, to a Jew, by far the most important, most interesting, and most perplexing of all the peculiarities of the gospel. No such doctrine could have been added to the ancient faith of the Jews, with whom the Unity of God was the proud and distinguishing tenet, without its occasioning some

controversy, between those who received, and those who persecuted the new faith. Yet no such controversy took place; neither is there the slightest appearance in the New Testament, that any objection, difficulty, or doubt arose in any quarter upon this ground. Is it not impossible, then, that any such doctrine should have been taught?

V. I have thus gone over a few heads of the Scriptural argument respecting the Divine Unity.

But in speaking thus decidedly respecting the testimony of the Scriptures, we must not be understood to assert, that there is nothing in this volume which seems to favor the Trinitarian doctrine, or that its advocates are altogether without plausible support. Far from it. There are undoubtedly many passages of difficult interpretation, and many expressions, more or less direct, which may be construed to assign Supreme Divinity to the Saviour, and personality to the Spirit. But there are two considerations which go to show, that although this be the case, yet the certainty of our doctrine is not in any degree affected by it.

1. The first of these considerations is, that the texts, *which speak most directly and plainly* on this subject, are decidedly Unitarian. These we have already quoted, and no forms of speech could be selected more explicit and unequivocal. But this is not the case with those texts which are quoted in support of the Trinity. Not one of them states the doctrine in so many words. The doctrine is made up by inference and argument from separate texts. Many of these texts are among the most perplexing and difficult passages in the Bible

—passages, which have tried the skill of interpreters in all ages, and have received a variety of expositions. Now it is plain that where such passages are cited in proof of the Trinity, the value of the citation must depend on the correctness of the criticism; that is, on the soundness of the reasoning by which the text is interpreted; that is, the doctrine is thus far supported by the power of reason simply. Need I say how different from the support which our principal texts give to the doctrine of the Unity? Thus it appears that the doctrine of the Trinity is mainly dependent for its support on processes of reasoning; processes, by which the most plain and decisive texts are made to bend to the less plain, and the easy are interpreted by the difficult. We think it safer not thus to trust our power of interpreting dark places, but to take the plain texts for our guide, and solve the dark ones by them. And if there be some which still remain obscure, and which we cannot satisfactorily clear up, we should esteem it safer to leave them as they are, unexplained, than to give them a meaning, and then find ourselves obliged to conform the plain texts to them. In the one case we should think that we followed our own power of logic, and in the other the simple word of revelation.

2. The second consideration to which I referred is this. The *assumption*, or *supposition*, which is resorted to in order to make these plain, decisive passages agree with the Trinitarian doctrine, is of a character to confirm us yet more strongly in our belief. This assumption is, that Jesus Christ possessed two perfect natures, the human and the divine; and that he sometimes

speaks and acts as man, and sometimes as God. — Now if this were expressly asserted in Scripture, it would be very well. But it is not so asserted, and, what is more, it is by none pretended to be expressly taught there. It is *argued* that it must be so, because it is a supposition which serves to remove difficulties, and to reconcile the language which is used respecting the Lord. But we have no right, it seems to me, to reason out for ourselves a doctrine of such magnitude as this for such a purpose; especially when it *creates* difficulties quite as embarrassing as those which it removes—it seems to me far more so. For look at the case a moment. The assertion is, that our Lord speaks and acts sometimes as God and sometimes as man. Accordingly when we argue thus — “he declares that he does not know the day or the hour—he says he can do nothing of himself—he prays to God;” it is then replied, “He says these things *as man*; he does not, *as man*, possess supreme power, or know the future; and *as man* he prays; but still *as God* he is omnipotent, and omniscient, and asks no blessing from on high.” Now this assertion may support the doctrine of the Trinity, and may evade certain difficulties which Scripture throws in its way; but does it not create a more serious difficulty than it removes? Let any man candidly examine the subject, and say whether it do not. For—I speak it reverently, and my hand trembles as I write—does it not attribute to our Lord a very strange way of speaking, and something of a deceptive manner; to say that he *does not know* when he really does, and that he *cannot do* what he has infinite power to do? For, if he



were God, it would not be *true* that he did not know the future; it would not be *true* that he did not his own will, and did not work miracles of himself. And therefore I beg to ask—in the name of all that is reverent and good—whether we can find it in our hearts to advocate a doctrine, which can be supported only on a supposition which exposes the blessed Jesus to the charge of untruth and deception; a supposition, which would render it impossible, if carried to its full extent, to believe any thing which he may say; for one has only to assert—“he spake this or that in his *human* nature, not as God, and therefore it has no authority;”—and then all his testimony on religious truth may be entirely set aside.

No. Let the plain declarations of our Saviour’s word be enough for us; and let us rejoice that we hold a faith, which allows us to believe every word that he said, *just as he uttered it*, without the necessity of explaining away a syllable, on the plea that he sometimes spake in one character, and sometimes in another.

Such are a few of the reasons which are directly and indirectly furnished by the Scriptures for holding the doctrine of the undivided Unity of God.

We regard it as the clear and unquestionable doctrine of Holy Writ, and therefore to be held with firm and decided faith. The more confident our persuasion that it is so, the more highly shall we value it, and the more shall we rejoice to see it extended and honored. If we feel that he whom we call Master and Lord, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who lived and died

that he might secure to us the blessing of our religion and whose kingdom we desire to spread with its holy and beneficent influences — if we believe that *he* taught and inculcated this doctrine; then, as his disciples, we shall desire that it prevail — for it is his Truth.

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T H R E E

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

A N S W E R E D ,

RELATING TO THE

CHRISTIAN NAME, CHARACTER, AND HOPES.

B Y H E N R Y W A R E , J R .

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION:  
B O S T O N .



# THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

## ANSWERED.

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IT is my object, in these pages, to consider and attempt to answer the three following questions: —

I. What is it to be a Christian?

II. How does a man become a Christian?

III. How shall a man satisfy himself that he is a Christian?

They are important questions, of very deep and serious personal interest. They deserve a careful consideration and solemn reply.

### I. WHAT IS IT TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

The word, *Christian*, is used in a particular and in a general sense. In a general sense, when we call those *Christians*, who dwell in a Christian community, and partake of the privileges of the Gospel. Every such man is so named in distinction from a Pagan, or one who lives in a pagan country. It is in this sense that we say any one is a Christian by birth.

Every man, also, who believes the Scriptures, is a

Christian, in opposition to a Deist or Infidel, who does not believe the Scriptures.

It is, not concerning a Christian in either of these senses, that we are to inquire; but concerning him who is to be acknowledged as such, on account of the full influence of the Gospel upon his own heart and character, and who, upon his own responsibility, independent of all other beings, is to receive a Christian's favor and happiness in the future world.

It is in this sense that the inquiry is so important to us. We are all of us Christians, if that mean, not to be Heathen. We are all of us Christians, I trust, in the sense of not being Infidels. But it is still a question, whether we are Christians in the special, saving sense of the word, so that we can appropriate to ourselves the promises of the Gospel, and lay claim to its hope and peace? If not, we might as well be pagans or infidels. It can avail us nothing to have the name, if we want the reality.

I say then, first of all, to be a Christian is precisely the same thing as to be a *Disciple of Jesus Christ*.

A *Disciple*, to speak in general terms, is one who acknowledges any one as his teacher, and faithfully follows his instructions. Thus, for example, those who chose Socrates or Plato for their teacher and lived according to their directions, imbibing, owning, and practising their system of philosophy, were called their *disciples*. Those who in like manner acknowledge and follow Mahomet as the prophet of God, are called his *disciples*. So the Jews were disciples of Moses; as some of them said to the man whom Jesus had healed, *thou art his disciple, but we are Moses's disciples*. And



to the same purpose we read, *the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ two things are necessary: to receive him as an Instructor, and to obey him as a Master.

1. To receive Christ as an instructor, to regard him as the teacher of our souls, at whose feet we are ready to sit as humble, docile pupils, and receive without question whatever he may communicate respecting God, and his character and purposes. He that is thus eager and willing to learn of Jesus as God's appointed Teacher, or, which is the same thing, to take his religion from the New Testament, is so far a Christian. And he has a perfect claim to the title, when, 2. He carries into practical effect those instructions, and faithfully conforms himself to them in heart, disposition, and conduct. This faith in him as a divine Teacher, and obedience to him as a Saviour, constitute a Christian.

Some, however, will step in here, and tell us that this is not sufficient. They will name a certain list of doctrines, which it is necessary to believe that Jesus taught; and declare, that no one is a Christian, who does not hold a certain specified form and number of religious articles. Of such I ask, who told you so? Who has given you a right to say, that there is only one sect in all Christendom which contains true disciples? for in fact the assertion amounts to this. Just as if it were not more well-pleasing to our Lord, that one should come to him and learn of him with right dispositions and faithful endeavors, than that he should simply attain a correct set of abstract opinions. There is not a passage in the New Testament, which requires a com-

pletely unerring faith, before one can be numbered with the disciples of Christ. I can point to a multitude of passages which require a *life* without error; but I do not remember one which requires a *faith* without error. On the contrary, I recollect that we are told “to receive the *weak* in faith;” and, what is more, to receive them without “doubtful disputations.”\* I recollect, too, that while the Twelve were always acknowledged by their living Master as his disciples, they had many great errors of faith, even in respect to the nature of his kingdom. But when they were humble, sincere, diligent, learners,—they listened to him, and followed him, and placed all their confidence in him; and therefore, notwithstanding their errors, they were received by him. It is plain, therefore, that no man is to be refused the name of Christian solely on account of the supposed imperfection of his faith. They that have drawn up their articles, and declare that all who do not conform to them are not Christians, are trying men by a wrong standard,—a standard, which their Master himself, by his conduct to his disciples, has discountenanced.

This point may be made perfectly clear at once, by appealing to every man’s experience and plain common sense. You meet with a man, who, in all the relations of life in which he moves, is marked for his uprightness and integrity, his good dispositions, and general benevolence. He says very little, perhaps seldom says any thing, about his religion; but withal is humble and distrustful of himself, mild and meek in his intercourse with men, punctual in his attendance on the wor

\* Romans xiv. 1.

ship and ordinances of God, and apparently diligent in the perusal of the Scriptures, which he seems to reverence and love and live by. What do you say of this man? Do you not consider him a Christian? You have never heard him converse for half an hour on religious subjects;—you do not know any thing of his opinions on any one of the great doctrines which have divided the church;—but you do not doubt that he is a Christian. Perhaps, well as you know him, you do not even know in what temple he worships, or with what church he communes; you have not thought to ask whether he be Methodist, or Quaker, or Episcopalian, or Baptist. But you do not doubt that he is a Christian. The evidence is stampd on every feature of his life; and you would as soon think of waiting for the anatomist to examine his body, before you would venture to call him a man, as you would wait to know his private opinions on controverted points, before you admit him to be a Christian. In such a case as this there is no dispute. All agree. All acknowledge Fenelon, and Lardner, and Doddridge, and Penn, and Wesley, to be Christians; and yet, on disputed topics, which some tell you is the standard, they all differed from each other as the four winds of heaven.

You meet with another man who presents a different aspect. He talks very often and very long about his religion; it is the favorite topic of his conversation, on which he dwells with earnestness and zeal, and condemns all who seem to be less zealous than himself. He lays urgent stress upon the peculiar doctrines which he has adopted; he proclaims their excellence, he argues for their truth, he is almost ready to suffer martyrdom

in their defence; and they are the very doctrines which are declared to be *the essentials* to the Christian. But then at the same time you discover that there is something in him of religious ostentation and spiritual pride; he does not govern his passions, he indulges his appetites, is selfish, and exerts himself but little for the benefit of others; and is quite censorious and uncharitable in his judgments. Now what do you say of such a man? Do you think that his merely holding that set of opinions, which is said to constitute a Christian, gives him a fair title to the Christian name? Do you not at once judge, that his feelings, dispositions, and character are more than an offset to these opinions? Does not every one judge so?

I have stated these two cases strongly, because it is easiest thus to put the principle to the test. Upon such cases, and they are by no means imaginary, there can be no difference of opinion; and they prove, that it is perfectly absurd to pretend that any certain set of opinions, beyond an acknowledgment of the divine authority of Jesus Christ and his gospel, is essential to a Christian, or constitutes a Christian.

They prove to us further, — that he is a genuine Disciple, who, having patiently and humbly learned of Jesus whatever he teaches, and cast himself on his gospel for salvation, faithfully cultivates *his* spirit, and forms his character according to that teaching and his example.

This is a definition which cannot be set aside. This will hold good amidst all the opposition of zeal and bigotry. This, in all practical decisions, ever has been and ever must be appealed to, by the sober common



sense and unanimous judgment of the whole Christian world.

He may be more or less enlightened. He may be more or less an adept in subtilties of doctrine and mysteries of knowledge. He may see reason to hold the five points of one, or stronger reason to abide by the five hundred of another. But if he have, with a good and honest heart, gone to the word of Jesus himself, and imbibed his spirit, and brought forth the fruits of that spirit—*heretic* he may be, but he is still a Christian: and from the living grave of the Inquisition, or the flaming pile of Protestant persecution, his meek and lowly spirit shall ascend to a righteous Judge, and be acknowledged in the presence of angels. Many, many, will appear on the right hand at the last day, whom human judgment would not suffer to live, because they were no Christians!

How important then is it for us to avoid the error of making our private opinions the standard by which to judge the claims of our fellow men! It is not the right standard by which to try *ourselves*; much less by which to try others. We cannot go beyond their general characters; and if their characters, under a charitable construction, are agreeable to the upright and devout spirit of the gospel, it is to the last degree arrogant and criminal in us to deny them the Christian name. We may think their opinions erroneous, and say so, if we please; but to denounce them as not Christians, because it is *our opinion* that *their opinions* are erroneous—words cannot express the absurdity.

That we may the more fully understand the Christian

character, let us go for a moment into detail, and notice some of the particulars of which it is composed.

1. First, then, the Christian is one who feels a deep and solemn interest in Religion, as a thing of the first importance to his happiness, and which is valuable to him above every thing else. This religious concern lies, as it were, at the bottom of his character. It is not a feeling which excludes all interest in the world and the pursuits of life; for he attends to the cares of his present calling as faithfully as any man. But he does not think them, as others do, the only things worth attending to; he thinks religion more important and mixes it with all other things. It has the first and ruling place among his desires.

2. The next thing is his devotedness to the Holy Scriptures. He humbly and thankfully betakes himself to them, as containing a complete and merciful revelation from God of all that pertains to duty, happiness, and eternity. Conscious of his own insufficiency, he casts himself upon the Scriptures in all his anxieties about religion and his soul, acknowledging no other rule for his faith, and no other guide to his conduct.

3. Another thing which distinguishes him is his piety. Love to God is with him the first and great commandment, to which all the other affections submit, and from which all other duties flow. This regard to the Supreme Being, exhibited in love, trust, holy fear, and habitual obedience, is an essential trait in the Christian's character.

4. His regard to his Saviour is another trait. He thinks often of his holy Master, delighting to remember him and dwell upon his pure and beautiful character, and his wonderful love to man.

5. He is distinguished by his dispositions towards his fellow men. His Master has taught him to feel toward them and treat them as brethren. He therefore does unto them, as he would have them do unto him. He is kind, mild, patient, and forgiving, not easily provoked, not proud, not censorious, not oppressive. One of the great peculiarities of the Gospel, lies in the meek and quiet spirit, which it inculcates and forms; in the graces of humility, purity, patience, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, benevolence. It was these which gave such singular eminence to the character of Jesus Christ, and made it so lovely. It was these, which he required with particular earnestness in his disciples. It is these which the apostle Paul enumerates with a special distinctness as the *fruits of the Spirit*; "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance." It was these, which our Lord singled out for a pointed benediction when he began his ministry, proclaiming, Blessed are the meek, the humble, the pure, the peaceable, the mourning, the persecuted. Dr. Buchanan tells us, that when he visited the Syrian churches, he found that eminent Christians were distinguished among them as *Men of the Beatitudes*. A beautiful and expressive title! A Christian, then, is A MAN OF THE BEATITUDES. He walks in the gentleness of his Lord's example, in the benignity of his Master's spirit. Neither the fashions of the world, nor the opinions of men, nor the principles of society, nor the solicitations nor example of those around him, can move him from a determined adherence to these maxims of his Lord. For he is aware, that just so far as he departs from them, he is unworthy the name of his disciple.

6. That he may keep alive in his heart this distrust of himself, this sense of his unworthiness and humility of soul, this reverence for the Scriptures, this devotedness to God, and these holy and benevolent dispositions; he is faithful in waiting on all the appointed means of grace and improvement. He slights not God's worship, neglects not his ordinances, and fails not to be constant and persevering in the private exercises of faith and piety. He does not regard them as the end and summit of all attainment, nor think them worthy of boasting; but they are necessary, he feels, to his life and growth in religion, and they afford his highest satisfactions.

These are some of the main particulars in which the disciple of Christ is distinguished; and we thus learn what it is to be a Christian.

I now come to the next inquiry.

## II. HOW DOES A MAN BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

We shall arrive most satisfactorily at the answer to this inquiry, if we will go back to the infancy of his being, and trace him onward to his full stature in Christian perfection.

When a human being is born into the world, it is an object of its Maker's complacency and love. Its soul is as yet unstained. It has done neither good nor evil. I do not say that it is an object of moral *approbation*; because one receives approbation only for what he has himself done. But if it have done no act of holy obedience to call for approbation, neither has it been guilty of sinful disobedience, to merit censure. It is just such as was fashioned by God — innocent, lovely: therefore



an object of God's complacent, kind regard. And if during infancy it be removed from earth, its unblemished spirit flies upward, and is welcomed with a smile to the bosom of its Father's eternal love.

It was in the spirit of such reflections as these, that the Son of God, when he had taken little children in his arms and blessed them, declared that of *such is the kingdom of Heaven*. He has thus encouraged us to look upon them as partakers of Divine favor; and has authorized us to believe and say, that every infant immortal, when first consigned to this state of discipline and preparation, is a member of the kingdom of heaven. The smiles of early infancy are sweet in the eyes of heaven's King; the death of early infancy is but the fading of a beautiful flower, that is to bloom afresh in the garden of heaven's King; "their angels do always behold the face of the Father in heaven; and it is not his will that one of these little ones should perish."

But it is still very evident, that spotless and lovely as the infant may be, it is yet no Christian. This implies, as we have seen, a knowledge of religion and a practice of actual goodness, of which its helpless age is incapable. How then shall the infant become a Christian?

I answer, in the first place, by instruction and education. He is *now* of the kingdom of heaven; why should he ever leave it? As soon as his reason dawns, let him be taught the knowledge of God and his providence; as soon as his affections open, let them be fixed on the great and infinite source of excellence and happiness; let his earliest lessons be concerning the life and Gospel of Jesus Christ, and his earliest steps be made to go in imitation of his example. May not this be done successfully,

so that he shall inevitably and incontrovertibly become a Christian? He never quits the kingdom of heaven of which he was originally a member, but, as soon as his moral powers begin their exercise, as soon as his moral accountableness commences, he chooses God for his Sovereign, Christ for his Master and Lord, his Gospel for his guide, his example for his pattern, his faith and hope for his support, his heaven for his home; he clings to them, lives by them, and as he grows in stature, grows also in favor with God and man.

The world, blessed be God, has seen many who thus have joined themselves to the fellowship of Jesus, without the misery and anguish of a late repentance; who have devoted themselves to God from the cradle, and have trodden in no other path than that of purity and truth, so exhibiting the temper of their Master, that all have taken notice of them that they have been with Jesus.

And certainly it is not strange that it should be so. It is the object of life to form a man's character for eternity. For this purpose he is exposed in various ways and to various trials. If some are overcome by these trials, it were to be expected that some also would not be overcome by them. When so many ways are open at the beginning of life, and so many choose evil ways, it is not strange that some should select the good way; that some should follow Christ, when so many follow the world. While such numbers lose the simplicity, openness, humility, and purity of their infant spirits, it cannot be thought surprising that some should retain them.

We do not mean by this that they are faultless, and never sin. By no means. Notwithstanding their good disposition, principles, and resolutions, they doubtless sin

often and much. But so do all Christians. The oldest, firmest, best, sin often and much. I have never heard of a Christian who was past sinning. The imperfection therefore of those who have become Christian by education, does not prove them to have no right to the name.

Many imagine it to be essential that a man be converted. But they seem not to consider the distinction between *conversion* and *repentance*. Every man must repent. But I do not see that it is possible for such a one as I have described to be converted, in the proper sense of that term. He doubtless has continual need of humility, and repentance for his remaining sinfulness; but so have those who have passed through the soundest and most satisfactory conversion. He may also, at some particular season, feel the sense of this, peculiarly burdensome and oppressive,—as I doubt not every religious man has had such a season. But in him I have described, it cannot be considered as the period of conversion. For such periods of humiliation and concern occur to the most established Christians. They do not prove that *they* were no Christians before; neither do they prove that *he* was none: they are not accounted times of regeneration in *them*; neither should they be in *him*. To convert is to turn; to be converted is to be turned,—not partially, from one thing, opinion, or character to its opposite, but completely. Now from what would you turn him? The most remarkable thing about him is his uniform regard to God and the Gospel. You would not turn him from that. To what would you turn him? To the faith of the Gospel? to the love of God? to the imitation of Christ? to sobriety, purity, righteousness, true holiness, temperance, and charity? Why, these things he has kept from his

youth up; they have been the objects of his solicitude, and pains, and prayers, ever since he knew that he had a soul. You cannot turn him into what he is already; and how then can he be converted? \*

\* It may be thought that the verse Matt. xviii. 3, presents an objection to what is here offered. *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* But that it does not, is evident from the following considerations.

1. This verse strikingly corroborates my main position, that all are to be regarded as at first members of the kingdom of heaven; for, in order that one, who is not, may become so, he must go back to his childlike character.

2. It is probable that our Lord's meaning in this passage is limited, and not universal. He is rebuking the ambitious temper of his disciples, who desire to know *who is greatest*. His reproof we may suppose confined to his temper, *except ye be turned from this disposition*, and become as little children:—which is made still more evident from the next verse—“whosoever, therefore, shall *humble himself*, as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

3. If we suppose the expression applicable to all others in a general sense, we must observe, that it only states what is necessary to those who are not already Christians; they must return to the character of childhood. But it leaves us at full liberty to understand, that those who have kept that character cannot be included, because they cannot go back.

4. If from this, or other passages, it be inferred that conversion was essential to all in the first age of the Gospel; this will not prove that it is essential now. Because it was the only possible mode of attaining the Christian character *then*, but *now* there is another; for the Gospel now is offered to the youngest children.

5. The Christian character is a certain state of heart and life. The evidence of its existence, in any case, is to be found not in a certain process of formation, but in the actual state of the man. One may be a Christian, though utterly unable to describe the means by which he became so. And if he be already, all that conversion is intended to make him, conversion is clearly unneces-



We may be satisfied then, that some men become Christians by education. They never go out from the kingdom of God; but in spite of temptation, and frequent wanderings, and many stains of unworthiness, they are, at heart and in principle, God's servants and children. They grow up Christians.

But there is still a large class of men who have not thus attached themselves to religion, and who, if they ever become Christians, must become so in later life. Instead of taking the Gospel for their guide, they have chosen some other leader; and under the control of appetite and passion, or worldly principle, they have left the kingdom of God, thrown off his allegiance, and followed the devices of their own hearts, without regard to his authority or revelation. There are many such in the world; and the question occurs, how shall they become Christians?

There can be but one answer to this question and that in one word:—*By Conversion.*

To these men may be applied the description, which

sary. The question is, *What is he*; not *Through what scenes has he been passing.*

6. The only solid foundation for the doctrine which this text is thought to support, is the supposition that every one inherits a thoroughly depraved nature, which lies under an eternal curse, and which can be made better only by a *literal* new creation, to which the power of God alone is adequate. This of course renders a supernatural regeneration necessary. These two doctrines stand and fall together. The one is an unavoidable consequence of the other. Those who maintain different views of the nature which man has received from God, are not bound to receive a tenet, which stands on no ground but that of total depravity; a tenet, which is essential to Calvinism, but not to Christianity.

the Apostle gives of the gentile state of the Ephesians; dead in trespasses and sins; without Christ; having no hope, and without God in the world; alienated from the life of God, and ignorant of heavenly things through the blindness of their hearts. So far as this description is applicable to them, they also, like the Ephesians, must put off the old and corrupt man, and be renewed in the spirit of their minds and put on the new man, who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. This is conversion; and nothing short of this can be rightly called conversion. The bad man must become good; the sinful, holy; the irreligious, religious; the thoughtless and worldly who have lived only for present good, must give their thoughts to God, and live for eternity, — must renew the spirit of their minds, as well as the corruption of the outward man.

Upon this point, I am fearful that we do not think and insist sufficiently. Many, indeed, have a settled dislike to all language of this sort; and when you speak to them of conversion or regeneration, they at once suspect you of fanaticism, and shut their ears to all that can be said. Undoubtedly a great deal of madness and mischief has been practised in the world, under shelter of these names, and the sober part of mankind have become disgusted at the extravagances which they have sanctioned. But certainly it cannot be wise to throw away a doctrine, because some have abused it. For the best doctrines have been perverted and abused. The simple question is, what must be done with those men, who have passed from infancy to age, careless of their souls, and guided by no religious principles? How are such to become Christians, except by conversion or regeneration, or—I am not solicitous

about the *name*, call it what you please — without a change of their dispositions, principles, and habits? If you will tell me how, I will urge the matter no further. If you tell me of any method by which a man, selfish, sensual, worldly, ambitious, proud, vicious, impious, can become humble, meek, spiritual, righteous, and devout, without a change of his dispositions, without being renewed in the spirit of his mind, — then I will give up the point at once. It is clear as the shadow on the dial, that it is impossible. And I fear that we suffer ourselves to think of it too little. We suffer men to grow up in bad habits, their affections devoted to present objects, making an idol of sensual good, and forgetful of their accountableness at last; and then we hope that they will become fit for heaven very easily, will enter on the way of truth, holiness, and salvation, without doing any great violence to their former partialities, or greatly sacrificing their favorite desires. But is not this preposterous? Can there be conceived a greater change than that which they need? — a change, of the very object of life, of the very principles of conduct, and of the prevalent dispositions of the soul. It is impossible that this should not be a great work; and important as it is great; and we wrong our fellow men, if we suffer them to imagine it small and easy and of little consequence. Words cannot express the importance of the Christian character; and we cannot say too much of the importance of that change, which is necessary to produce it where it does not exist.

The unwillingness of many to believe that conversion, or regeneration, is necessary to any man, has principally, perhaps wholly, arisen from the injudicious and irrational manner, in which the doctrine is oftentimes stated and defended. They have heard it declared, that man is

entirely incapable of doing any thing in it by his own exertions, and that it is wholly, in its commencement, progress, and completion, the arbitrary and sovereign work of God's Spirit, whose influences he imparts or withholds at his pleasure. This statement has appeared to them to take away the guilt of the unconverted, and to destroy the doctrine of accountableness; while, laying great stress upon ardent, rapturous, indefinable, feelings, it has invited and encouraged fanaticism, and cherished spiritual pride by the belief that they were all the result of God's special and distinguishing love. But the objections of a rational mind to *this* doctrine of regeneration, are wholly inapplicable to that which I am contending for, as the doctrine of the Gospel. I speak of nothing arbitrary, mysterious, or fanatical; but of a change in dispositions, affections, and character, to which any man is competent in the use of his natural powers, assisted by the means which the religion of Christ puts within his reach, and by those Divine influences which are bestowed upon all who need. With the knowledge and faith of the Gospel, it is in the power of any man to turn to God, *the spirit helping his infirmities*. If the sinner would attain the Christian character and hope, he must diligently set himself to *work out his own salvation with fear and trembling*. It is then that *God will work in him to will and to do, of his good pleasure*. Without this diligence, the influences of the Spirit are as useless, as the sunshine and rain of heaven are to him who leaves his field, uncultivated, to run to waste.

We have thus learned in answer to our inquiry, that the sincere and true disciples of Jesus Christ are some of them formed by a gradual growth in the regular education and discipline of life; while others are brought out from



amidst a vicious world by a change in their views, feelings, dispositions, and principles of action, not different in kind though less in degree, from that by which heathen sinners were originally called to the Church.

III. Our third question is, HOW SHALL A MAN SATISFY HIMSELF THAT HE IS A CHRISTIAN?

There are many tests of Christian standing presented in the New Testament, differing according to the circumstances of those to whom they are applied, which it might be useful to every one to collect and accommodate to his own case. But there is none so often repeated, and with so much emphasis, as that of *obedience*. *Ye are my friends*, said our Lord, *IF YE DO WHATSOEVER I COMMAND YOU*. This saying of Jesus is the more deserving our regard, because it was solemnly uttered during his last interview with his disciples on the night before he suffered, and he evinced his sense of its importance by repeating it, though in a varied form, not less than five several times.\* If it were a sure and sufficient test for his disciples at that time, it must be so for all others.

It is true, that on the same occasion he told them, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have *love one to another*.” To the same purpose the Apostle John, By this do we know that we have passed from death unto life, because *we love the brethren*. These passages would seem to imply, that the sure test of Christian standing is brotherly love. But brotherly love is *one of the commandments* of Christ, even his new and special commandment. It is therefore included in the text which I quoted; and this is better as a universal guide, because

\* See John xiv. 15, 21, 23, 24, and v. 8, 14.

more comprehensive, comprising every other rule or guide which might be selected or named. It coincides also with the whole spirit and purpose of the New Testament, and with the most frequently repeated declarations both of our Saviour and the Apostles. When the young Ruler inquired, Good master, what shall I do that I may have eternal life; our Lord's answer was, *Keep the commandments*. When told that his mother and brethren desired to see him, he replied, Who is my mother, or my brethren? Whosoever shall *do the will of God*, the same is my sister, and brother, and mother. He declared, that the man *who heareth and doeth his sayings*, is like him who builds his house upon a rock, which nothing can overthrow; and that it is he only who *doeth the will* of his Father, who shall enter the kingdom of heaven. To the same purpose the apostle Paul; not the *hearers* of the law, but the *doers* of it shall be justified. And again, he says, that eternal life is promised to those who seek it by *patient continuance in well-doing*. Passages of this import might be greatly multiplied, which would prove that the test I have selected is but the echo of the universal doctrine of the Gospel.

It recommends itself also by its *simplicity and easy application*, as well as by the stress laid upon it by our Lord and the Apostles. In the work of self-examination it directs the mind at once. It leaves no room for shuffling or evasion, but presents a direct, *home* question. We can be at no loss how to put it, or how to ascertain the reply. It is on a point which admits of evidence, clear, distinct, positive, undeniable evidence. There is no escaping by means of the obscurity of the thing inquired for, through any vagueness or equivocation. But, *Have I kept the com-*

*mandments, do I do whatsoever I am commanded*, are questions so intelligible, plain, and pointed, that we are compelled to see their meaning and feel the reply.

In all these respects, how greatly has this an advantage over other tests, which are sometimes used for determining our Christian standing. If it be certain *doctrines*; we could not be certain, amidst the unavoidable differences of those who even most nearly agree, that we held them in the right sense, or that they were attained with sufficient fairness of inquiry, or are accompanied by all their right consequences. If it be certain *feelings*; they are something which we cannot define, or express in words, or measure by any determinate standard, and which may be mixed with a thousand undetected imperfections. If it be certain *ceremonies* or *observances*, or a *comparison* of ourselves with other men, or any past *experience* of religion; it is obvious that they are all very fallacious and uncertain, and leave never failing room for doubt, uneasiness, and apprehension.

But when we come to the test of *keeping the commandments*, all is clear, settled, and unambiguous. It is only to know what they are, which is easily known, and the question is answered as soon as it is asked. Any man who looks at his life and character, can tell whether he have kept the commandments or not. Nothing but the most criminal carelessness and unfaithfulness can prevent his discovering it.

It should be considered too, that this is the only test which is at all difficult, or amounts to an actual trial. External homage, of whatever sort, is easy. The hypocrite can give it. Inflamed zeal may be superficial, or constitutional, or unsanctified passion. Modes of faith

may be, and most commonly are, the mechanical result of education or circumstances. They are given a man by his parents and teachers, not by his own efforts or by the Scriptures. There are very few of whom it is not evident, that if educated in a different way and with other companions, they would have held a different faith. These things, therefore, leave uncertain the real state and character of a man. But *obedience* is by his own personal effort and trial; oftentimes demanding severe and toilsome labor, and requiring occasional sacrifices and privations, which demonstrate his sincerity, and the strength of his principle, and put beyond question the submission of his soul to God. There can be no doubt concerning the man whose obedience is uniform and universal.

Besides; this rule of our Lord, short as it is, is far more comprehensive than any other. It comprises every thing. It omits nothing. Not a question concerning Christian character or duty can arise, which this does not embrace. And here it is important to prevent misapprehension. When we say that a Christian is known by his *keeping the commandments*,—there are many ready to object to the assertion, and say that the standard is altogether insufficient; that is going no deeper than the outside; that is neglecting internal principle and purity; for that the commandments may be kept from worldly motives, by a man who possesses nothing of Christian spirituality.

But this objection appears to be wholly founded in mistake. We consider, that the internal principle is as much a *part* of the commandment, as the outward action, and that no man keeps the commandments of the Gospel, who observes only their external requirements. It were absurd to imagine otherwise, because one of the chief and



most distinguishing commands is, that the heart be pure and the motive good. Impurity of heart, or a bad motive, breaks the command just as much as murder, or fraud, or false witness. It is a very erroneous notion, therefore, that the "commandments" only relate to external conduct. There are commandments for faith, repentance, humility, heavenly-mindedness, spiritual-mindedness, and every holy thought and exalted spiritual exercise. Every Christian feeling, desire, and disposition are as much comprehended in them, as sobriety of deportment, and honesty in dealings. They are all, consequently, comprised in that test of Christian standing which I have named and recommended. The question, there, is not, have you done *part* of what I commanded; but have you done *whatsoever* I commanded. Not, have you observed the rules which concern external morals, but have you observed *all* the rules of Christ's gospel;—and surely you would not think of omitting among these, those rules respecting the inner man, and the conduct and discipline of the soul, which are in fact the most peculiar and positive of the whole.

So that the expression is not so confined and limited as might be supposed; but perhaps is as extensive as could be chosen. It sets us, in one word, upon inquiry, not only concerning our duties to man, but to GOD; not only concerning our actions, but our principles and motives; not only concerning the decent regularity of our deportment, but the spiritual state and exercises of our mind.

Thus then we find an answer to the question we were asking, How shall a man know that he is a Christian? He may know it, by finding that *he does whatsoever his Lord commands him*. Let him studiously and faithfully

look at himself, and inquire how far his dispositions, feelings, tastes, principles, and mode of life, are regulated by the requirements and spirit of the Gospel. Let him examine how far the love of God reigns within him; how far the love of his neighbor directs his conduct toward him; how far he maintains a proper watch and government and control over his passions, propensities, and desires; particularly, how far he possesses that peculiar spirit of benevolence, meekness, forbearance, and humility, which so distinguished the character of his Lord and Master. He may be sure, that so far as in these things he goes according to the commands of Christ, just so far he is a Christian; and so far as he is deficient in any of these, just so far he is no Christian.

I am confidently persuaded, that every other test than this, is deceitful and inadequate. We may judge ourselves by any other standard, and only be led astray. But if we try ourselves by this, we cannot fail to know ourselves, except we be wilfully blind. When we find that *we have the dispositions and character of disciples*, we may be satisfied that we *are* disciples; but without them, all faith, and knowledge, and zeal, afford not the smallest satisfaction under heaven. This is no question of certain opinions, and doctrines, and forms, and observances, but of spirit and holiness:—*if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his:—without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* Neither is it a question by what process we obtain this character, or whether we can remember its commencement, and detail its progress. The only important question is, Do we possess it? Every other inquiry is swallowed up in this. For we might repeat the truest stories of once experienced raptures, and remove moun-

tains by our faith, and overcome kingdoms by our zeal; and yet, if we be not “formed after God, in righteousness and true holiness,” we should be much nearer the school of the Pharisees than that of Christ.

In regard to this subject, we have a most important and solemn duty of self-examination, an examination which relates to nothing less than our personal claims to share the name of Christ, and the hope and prospect of our souls for eternity. Of all questions which can come before us, there is none to be compared to this in deep and awful interest; none, which it is of any consequence, comparatively speaking, that we should be in haste to settle. Let us, then, put away, for a moment, all indifference and levity, and try ourselves by the standard of Christ, and ascertain whether we be truly his disciples. The question is not whether we believe the Bible, whether we are Pagans, or Infidels. The answer to this is easy, and we are too ready to be satisfied with it. But it relates to our personal claims to the hopes and promises of the Gospel. “There are,” says a certain writer,\* “two sorts of Christianity; the one opposed to infidelity, the other opposed to worldly-mindedness.” Suppose that we have the first, and hate infidelity; yet what will that avail us, if we have not also the second, and hate worldly-mindedness? Of what use to put the Bible under our arm, and walk forward in the way of sin? Of what use to possess the candle of the Gospel, and boast of it, and yet put it under a bushel, and go about our deeds of darkness?

Upon this subject it is necessary to come home to ourselves, and meet the interrogation openly and fairly. It is simply, *Are we Christians*—not, were we born in a

\* H. Moore's *Practical Piety*.

Christian land, and baptized in a Christian church, and can we repeat a Christian creed; not, have we the Bible in our houses, and do we attend public worship on the Sabbath. Let us not suffer ourselves to be led away by any such evasions. But *Are we* CHRISTIANS in deed and in truth, at heart, in spirit, thoroughly, earnestly? Do we receive from the Scriptures of Jesus their holy teachings, and faithfully follow them in life, conversation, and temper?

It can avail us nothing to temporize in this matter, and strive to stifle the conviction of our deficiencies. The state of things will not be changed by our refusing to see what it is. Better far that the inquiry should disturb us now, than that we should go sluggishly on, satisfied with our general standing and general name, till it is too late to recover ourselves. Let us then be honest and know the truth. It can profit us nothing to have a name to live, while we are yet dead; to walk with the followers of Christ, and yet not be numbered with his friends. This is the most dreadful of all delusions, — the more dreadful, because voluntary. God grant, therefore, that by a timely knowledge of ourselves on earth, we may escape the shame and horror, at the last day, of seeing ourselves in our true characters for the first time; and of discovering, that although we have been all our lives long crying out, “Lord, Lord,” — yet we must be rejected as strangers, because *we have not done the will of our Father who is in Heaven.*



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OF

MAN'S SPIRITUAL NATURE

IN REGARD TO THE

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH.

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BY JAMES WALKER, D.D.

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## FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH.

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FAITH, in the sense in which I propose to use that term in the following pages, is defined in Scripture as being "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." By it we can and do regard many things which lie beyond the sphere of our senses and actual experience as really existing, and are affected by them as realities. By it the spiritually-minded of all religious persuasions, in proportion as they are spiritually-minded, feel a confidence and practical assurance in the existence and reality of the spiritual world. It is this principle which constitutes man, unlike the inferior animals, a religious being; and it is by a right development of this principle that we become capable of seeing Him who is invisible, of being affected by those things which pertain to our inward and spiritual life as if addressed to the senses, and of holding free, intimate, and habitual communion with the Unseen, the Infinite, and the Eternal.

Now it is remarkable of the infidelity of the present day, that it strikes at the very existence of this principle, considered as an element or property of the human soul. Not

content with disputing in detail the evidences of natural and revealed religion, or driven, perhaps, from this ground, it thinks to cut the matter short by denying that man has any faculties for the apprehension of spiritual existences, or of any existences but such as are cognizable by the senses, and so far as they are cognizable by the senses. I have no fears that many amongst us, or that any who are accustomed to contemplate and study the workings of their moral and spiritual nature, will be seduced and carried away by this gross form of sensualism, which they must feel and know to be contradicted and entirely set aside by the facts of their own inward experience. Still it may be well, in connection with the evidences of Christianity, to begin by setting forth, in the simplest and clearest language of which the subject is susceptible, the true philosophy of man's moral and spiritual nature in regard to the foundations of faith.

In the present discourse I shall endeavor to establish, illustrate, and enforce, as much at length as my limits will permit, the three following propositions: —

*First*, that a little reflection will convince every one alive to noble thoughts and sentiments, that the *existence* of those spiritual faculties and capacities, which are assumed as the *foundation* of religion in the soul of man, is attested and put beyond controversy by the *revelations of consciousness*.

*Secondly*, that *religion in the soul*, consisting as it does of a manifestation and development of these spiritual faculties and capacities, is as much *a reality in itself*, and *enters as essentially into our idea of a perfect man*, as the corresponding manifestation and development of the reasoning faculties, a sense of justice, or the affections of sympathy and benevolence.



And *thirdly*, that from the acknowledged existence and reality of spiritual impressions or perceptions we may and do assume *the existence and reality of the spiritual world*; just as, from the acknowledged existence and reality of sensible impressions or perceptions, we may and do assume the existence and realities of the sensible world.

These three propositions being established, it will follow, that our conviction of the existence and reality of the spiritual world is resolvable into the same *fundamental law of belief* as that on which our conviction of the existence and reality of the sensible world depends.

I. My first proposition is, that a little reflection will convince every one alive to noble thoughts and sentiments, that the *existence* of those spiritual faculties and capacities, which are assumed as the *foundation* of religion in the soul of man, is attested and put beyond controversy by the *revelations of consciousness*.

Some writers contend for the existence of an unbroken chain of beings, starting from the lowest form of inorganic matter, and mounting upwards by regular and insensible gradations to the highest order of created intelligences. Others insist on a division of substances into material and immaterial, and make one of the principal arguments for the soul's spirituality and immortality to depend on the nature of its substance, and not on the nature of the laws and conditions imposed upon it. Happily, neither of these questions is necessarily implicated in the views I am about to offer, and both may therefore be dismissed at once from the discussion; the former as being a little too fanciful, and the latter as being a little too metaphysical, for the generality of minds. It is enough if persons will recognize the obvious fact, that, in the ascending scale of being, as the

vegetable manifests some properties which do not belong to crude and inert matter, and as the animal manifests some properties which do not belong to the mere vegetable, so man, as man, manifests some properties which do not belong to the mere animal. He is subject, it is true, to many of the laws and conditions of crude and inert matter, to many of the laws and conditions of vegetable life, and to many of the laws and conditions of animal life; but he also has part in a still higher life, — the life of the soul. He brings into the world the elements of a higher life, the life of the soul, the acknowledged phenomena of which can no more be resolved into the laws and conditions of mere sensation, than into those of vegetation or mere gravitation. This higher life, consisting, among other things, of a development of conscience, the sentiment of veneration, and the idea of the perfect and the absolute, constitutes the *foundation* of religion in the soul of man, the existence and reality of which is attested, as I hold, and is put beyond controversy, by the revelations of consciousness.

I do not suppose, of course, that the existence of the above-mentioned properties or affections of the soul is matter of sensation. I do not suppose that we can see, or hear, or feel, or taste, or smell a mental faculty, a moral sentiment, or an idea. Their existence, supposing them to exist, *could* be revealed to us by consciousness alone; and by consciousness it *is* revealed to us; and the evidence of consciousness in a question of this nature is final and decisive. It is not a matter of sensation nor of logic, but of consciousness alone. We are conscious of their existence; and being so, whatever we may say, or however we may argue to the contrary, we cannot, practically speaking, doubt it, even if we would, any more than we can doubt

the testimony of the senses. Reflect for one moment. What evidence have you of the existence of your own mind, — of the power of thought, or even of the power or the fact of sensation itself, but the evidence of consciousness? Nay, what evidence have you of your own individual being and personality, — that you are yourself and not another, that you are a man and not a horse or a tree, that you are awake and alive, and not asleep or dead, — but the evidence of consciousness? None whatever. You can say, “I am conscious of being what I am”; and that is all you can say. An archangel cannot say anything more. It is not a matter of sensation or of argument, but of consciousness alone. If, therefore, you are conscious of possessing not only a sensual and an intellectual, but also a moral and spiritual nature, you have as good evidence for believing that this moral and spiritual nature really exists, and that you possess it, as you have for believing that you exist at all.

“True,” the sensualist may say; “this does prove the existence of something which we call our moral and spiritual nature; but it does not prove that this *something* belongs to our original constitution, that it has its root and foundation in the soul, that it cannot be resolved into a mere figment of the brain.” And then, in the accustomed vein of this philosophy, he will be likely to urge, “Your conscience, — what is it? One thing in the child, and another thing in the man; one thing in this age or country, and another thing in that; here expressly forbidding what there it as expressly enjoins. And your sentiment of veneration, — what is it? To-day prostrate before sticks and stones, to-morrow adoring the host of heaven; among one people deifying a virtue, among another, a man, among



another, an onion ; now manifesting itself under the forms of the grossest superstition, and now breaking out into the excesses of the wildest fanaticism. And your idea of the Absolute and the Perfect, — what is it but an hallucination of the metaphysically mad, — the finite vainly thinking to comprehend the infinite ? Do not all these things, therefore, though they exist or are thought to exist in the human mind, when a little more carefully examined, look very much like figments of the brain ?”

How long is the plain, practical good sense of mankind to be abused by a sophistry like this, which owes all its apparent force and pertinency to a sort of logical sleight of hand, that, with a quickness making it imperceptible to slow minds, substitutes for the real question at issue another having nothing to do with the subject ? So far as the present discussion is concerned, it matters not whether conscience, as already instructed and educated, always decides correctly, or never decides correctly. I am not contending, as everybody must perceive who is capable of understanding the argument, for the correctness or uniformity of the *decisions* of conscience, a circumstance which must depend, of course, on the nature and degree of instruction and education it has received, but for the *existence* of conscience itself, not as a figment of the brain, but as an element of our moral and spiritual nature. What I maintain is simply this : that every man is born with a moral faculty, or the elements of a moral faculty, which, on being developed, creates in him the idea of a right and a wrong in human conduct ; which leads him to ask the question, “What is right ?” or “What *ought* I to do ?” which summons him before the tribunal of his own soul for judgment on the rectitude of his purposes ; which grows up into an habitual



sense of personal responsibility, and thus prepares him, as his views are enlarged, to comprehend the moral government of God, and to feel his own responsibility to God, as a moral governor. My reasonings and inferences, therefore, are not affected, one way or another, by the actual state of this or that man's conscience, or by the fact that probably no two consciences can be found which exactly agree. A man's conscience, we must presume, according to the influences under which he has acted, will be more or less excited and developed, and more or less enlightened and educated. Still, we hold it to be undeniable that every man has a conscience *to be* excited and developed, enlightened and educated; that in this sense conscience has its root and foundation in the soul, and that man herein differs essentially from the most sagacious of the inferior animals, and, unlike them, was originally constituted *susceptible* of religion.

And so, too, of the sentiment of veneration or devotion, considered as an original and fundamental propensity of the human mind, I care not, so far as my present purpose is concerned, under what forms it has manifested itself, or to what excesses or abuses it has led. These very excesses and abuses only serve to demonstrate the existence and strength of the principle itself, as they evince such a craving of our nature for religion, that it will accept of any, even the crudest and most debasing, rather than have none. Could this be, if we were not made to be religious? No matter what may be the immediate or ostensible object of this sentiment, — a log, a stone, or a star, the god of the hills, or the god of the plains, "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord," — still it is veneration, still it is devotion. Neither can the principle itself, by any show of evidence or just analysis, be

resolved into a mere figment of the brain, or a mere creature of circumstances; for, in some form or other, it has manifested itself under all circumstances, and in every stage of the mind's growth, as having its root and foundation in the soul. The sentiment may be, and often has been, misdirected and perverted; but there is the sentiment still, with nothing to hinder its being excited, developed, and directed aright, and the result is religion. There is the sentiment disposing man to look upward to a higher power, and inducing faith in the invisible; a quality in which the most sagacious of the inferior animals do not share in the smallest degree, and which proves, if final causes prove anything, that man was made for worship and adoration.

One word more respecting our capacity to form an idea of the Absolute and the Perfect. The shallow and flippant jeer, that it is the finite vainly thinking to comprehend the infinite, comes from substituting the literal sense of the term *comprehend*, as applied to bodies, for its figurative sense as applied to minds; making the comprehension of an idea to resemble the grasping or embracing of a globe with the hands or the arms. Besides, we need not say that man can, strictly speaking, *comprehend* the Absolute and the Perfect, but only that he can *apprehend* them as really existing; and there is this difference between the literal import of apprehension and a full comprehension, that one can lay hold of what he would not think to be able at once to clasp. However this may be, it is certain that the idea of the Infinite grows up in the human mind, as it is cultivated and expanded, and becomes an essential condition of thought. As a proof of this, let any one try and see if he can separate the idea of infinity from his idea of space

and duration ; or, in other words, whether he can possibly conceive of mere space or mere duration as otherwise than infinitely extended. Moreover, the very idea of imperfection, as such, involves at least some faint glimmering of an idea of the Perfect, with which it is compared, and without which imperfection would be to us as perfection. In other words, if we had no idea of perfection, we could have no idea of its absence, which is what we mean by imperfection. So likewise in contemplating things accidental and dependent, the idea of the Absolute grows up in the mind, —the idea of something that is *not* accidental and dependent, and on which everything that is accidental and dependent leans and is sustained. In short, the mind of man is so constituted, that, in the full development of its intellectual powers, it can find no real satisfaction, no resolution of its doubts and difficulties, but in the idea of the Absolute and the Perfect. Take away this idea, and existence itself becomes an enigma, a meaningless and objectless phantasm. Give us back this idea, and it again becomes a consistent, intelligible, and magnificent whole. Man, unlike the most sagacious of the inferior animals, is so constituted, that this reaching after the Absolute and the Perfect enters into and forms an essential element of his moral and spiritual nature, giving him not only a capacity but a predisposition for that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.”

Therefore do we say, and say confidently, that a foundation for religion is laid in the soul of man, the existence whereof is attested and put beyond controversy by the revelations of consciousness. This is my first proposition, and I have only to add in respect to it two brief suggestions. If, as we have seen, a foundation for religion is laid

in the soul of man, can we bring ourselves to believe for one moment that it is laid there for nothing? And again, if, as we have seen, a foundation for a higher life than that of the senses is laid in the soul of man, must it not be accounted a sort of insanity in us, to say nothing of its sinfulness, to refuse or neglect to build upon it?

II. Here my second proposition comes in, which asserts that *religion in the soul*, consisting as it does of a manifestation and development of our spiritual faculties and capacities, is as much a *reality in itself*, and enters as *essentially into the idea of a perfect man*, as the corresponding manifestation and development of the reasoning powers, a sense of justice, or the affections of sympathy and benevolence.

Modern philosophy has revived an important distinction, much insisted on by the old writers, between what is *subjectively* true and real, that is to say, true and real so far as the mind itself is concerned, and what is *objectively* true and real, that is to say, true and real independently of the mind. Thus we affirm of things, the existence of which is reported by the senses, that they really exist both subjectively and objectively; that is to say, that the mind is really affected as if they existed, and that, independently of this affection of the mind, the things themselves exist. In other words, we have an idea of the thing really existing *in* the mind, and this is subjective truth and reality; and there is also an object answering to that idea really existing *out of* the mind, and this is objective truth and reality. One sense, therefore, there certainly is, in which the most inveterate sceptic must allow that religion has a real and true existence to the really and truly devout. Subjectively it is real and true, whether objectively it is



real and true, or not. All must admit that it is true and real so far as the mind itself is concerned, even though it cannot be shown to have existence independently of the mind. It is a habit or disposition of soul, and in any view of the matter the habit or disposition truly and really exists. It is a development of our nature, a development of character, and, as such, is as true and real as any other development of nature and character. Even if it feeds on illusions, it is not itself an illusion. Even if, in its springing up, it depends on nothing better than a fancy, a dream, its growth in the soul, and the fruit of that growth, are realities, — all-important, all-sustaining realities.

I dwell on this distinction, because it is one which the sensualists, from policy or perversity, would fain wink out of sight, making the question at issue to be, whether religion is, or is not, a mere illusion. This is not the question. Take any view of the matter, take the sensualist's view of the matter, and still it is undeniable that religion itself, as it exists in the soul of the devout, is a reality, as much so as any other habit or disposition of soul, as much so as taste, or conscience, or parental or filial affection; and its effects are as real.

Nor is this all. Religion in the soul enters essentially into our idea of a *perfect man*. Suppose a man perfect in his limbs, features, and bodily proportions, but entirely destitute of understanding; would he answer to anybody's idea of a perfect man? No. Give him, then, a perfect understanding, but still let him be entirely destitute of moral sensibility, — as dead to sentiment as before he was to thought, — would he answer to anybody's idea of a perfect man? No. And why not? Because we mean by a perfect man, one in whom the whole nature of man is

developed, in its proper order, and just relations and proportions. Now, as has been demonstrated, a foundation for *religion* is laid in the human soul. In other words, we have spiritual faculties and capacities, as well as intellectual and moral faculties and capacities; and the former constitute a part of our nature as truly as the latter; and this part of our nature must be developed. Otherwise the entire man is not put forth. Part of his nature, and of his higher nature too, it may be said, is yet to be born; and thus it is that a deep and true philosophy re-asserts and confirms the Christian doctrine of regeneration. We are born at first into the visible or sensible world; when we become alive to the invisible or spiritual world, we may be said to be born again; and it is not till after this second birth that we become all which, as men, we are capable of becoming. It is not, I repeat it, until after this second birth, consisting, as I have said, in a development of our spiritual faculties and capacities, that the entire man is revealed, or our idea of a perfect man realized or approached.

Every well-constituted mind must be painfully conscious of this truth, though often without being aware of the cause of its uneasiness, in reading the lives or contemplating the fame of men of eminence, and sometimes perhaps of integrity and philanthropy, but destitute of religion. Doubtless a man may have some of the forms of greatness and goodness without having all; and nothing can be further from my purpose or disposition than to derogate from any form of either, wherever found and however connected. Still, when we behold a manifestation of the lower forms of greatness and goodness without the higher, an impression is left on the mind similar to what is universally felt on seeing a foundation laid for a noble structure, and that

structure carried up far enough with the richest materials to indicate the grand and comprehensive plan of the architect, which plan, however, from some cause has been interrupted and broken off midway.

Thus far have I reasoned, as you will perceive, from what consciousness attests and puts beyond controversy respecting the moral and spiritual nature of man. Waiving the question whether anything exists *out of* the mind corresponding to our idea of religion *in* the mind, — waiving the question whether the objects of our faith have a true and real existence independently of the mind itself, — still the conclusion, as we have seen, is unavoidable, that this faith has its foundation in human nature, that its development is a true and real development of our nature, and that it is absolutely essential to our nature's entire and perfect development. Whether religion exists independently of the mind or not, we know that, to those who have it, it has a true and real existence *in the mind*; that it is a source of true and real strength, solace, and hope; and that men, as men, can truly and really do, bear, and enjoy with it, what they could not do, bear, or enjoy without it. Even, therefore, if the discussions were to stop here, it would follow incontestably, that to disown or neglect religion because of this or that real or supposed logical difficulty, would be to do violence at the same time to both those instinctive desires, from one or the other of which it is said a rational being, as such, must always act, — a desire of happiness and a desire of perfection.

III. But the discussion does not stop here. I maintain, and this is my third and last proposition, that from the acknowledged existence and reality of spiritual impressions or perceptions we may and do assume *the existence and*

*reality of the spiritual world*; just as from the acknowledged existence and reality of sensible impressions or perceptions we may and do assume the existence and reality of the sensible world.

Most of you, I presume, are apprised of the extravagance of scepticism into which men have been betrayed by insisting on a *kind* of evidence of which the nature of the case does not admit. Some have denied the existence of the spiritual world; others have denied the existence of the sensible world; and others again have denied the existence of both worlds, contending for that of impressions or perceptions alone. These last, if we are to believe in nothing but the facts of sensation, and what can be *logically* deduced from these facts, are unquestionably the only consistent reasoners. For what logical connection is there between a fact of sensation, between an impression or perception, and the real existence of its object, or of the mind that is conscious of it? None whatever. I do not mean that a consistent reasoner will hesitate to admit the real existence of the objects of sensation. Practically speaking, he cannot help admitting their real existence, if he would. Every man, woman, and child believes in his or her own existence, and in that of the outward universe or sensible world; but not because the existence of either is susceptible of proof by a process of reasoning. Not the semblance, not the shadow of a sound logical argument can be adduced in proof of our own existence, or that of the outward universe. We believe in the existence of both, it is true; but it is only because we are so constituted as to make it a matter of intuition. Let it be distinctly understood, therefore, that our conviction of the existence of the sensible world does not rest on a logical deduction from the



facts of sensation, or of sensation and consciousness. It rests on the constitution of our nature. It is resolvable into a fundamental law of belief. It is held, not as a logical inference, but as a first principle. With the faculties we possess, and in the circumstances in which we are placed, the idea grows up in the mind, and we cannot expel it if we would.

Now the question arises, On what does a devout man's conviction of the existence and reality of the *spiritual world* depend? I answer, On the very same. He is conscious of spiritual impressions or perceptions, as he also is of sensible impressions or perceptions; but he does not think to demonstrate the existence and reality of the objects of either by a process of reasoning. He does not take the facts of his inward experience, and hold to the existence and reality of the spiritual world as a logical deduction from these facts, but as an intuitive suggestion grounded on these facts. He believes in the existence and reality of the spiritual world, just as he believes in his own existence and reality, and just as he believes in the existence and reality of the outward universe, — simply and solely because he is so constituted that with his impressions or perceptions he cannot help it. If he could, it would be to begin by assuming it to be possible that his faculties, though in a sound state and rightly circumstanced, may play him false; and if he could begin by assuming this as barely possible, there would be an end to all certainty. Demonstration itself, ocular or mathematical, would no longer be ground of certainty. It is said that sophistical reasoning has sometimes been resorted to in proof of the existence and reality of the spiritual world; and this perhaps is true; but the error has consisted in supposing that

any reasoning is necessary. It is not necessary that a devout man's conviction of the existence and reality of the spiritual world should rest on more or on better evidence than his conviction of the existence and reality of the sensible world; it is enough that it rests on as much, and on the very same. It is enough that both are resolvable, as I have shown, into the same fundamental law of belief; and that, in philosophy as well as in fact, this law ought to exclude all doubt in the former case, as well as in the latter.

But how, it may be asked, according to the views here presented, can we account for the fact of such different and conflicting spiritual impressions or perceptions? If a spiritual world really exists, why do not all men apprehend it alike? Because, I hardly need reply, it is contemplated under such widely different aspects, and by persons whose spiritual faculties and capacities are variously developed, and, above all, because in spiritual things the best people are so prone to mix up and confound their inferences with their simple perceptions. There is nothing, therefore, in the real or apparent diversity of our spiritual impressions or perceptions, which should shake our confidence in the principle, that, to a rightly constituted and fully developed soul, moral and spiritual truth will be revealed with a degree of intuitive clearness and certainty equal at least to that of the objects of sense. Besides, a like diversity in our views and theories prevails in respect to the material world; but nobody thinks, merely on the strength of this, seriously to raise a doubt whether the material world exists at all. And it is further urged, that the most spiritual men may sometimes be tempted to say of their religious experience, "Perhaps it may turn out to be an illusion"; it should be recollected that this is no more than what they

may also, in moments of inquietude and despondency, be tempted to say of *all* their experience. They may say of all their experience, "Perhaps it may turn out to be an illusion." At this very moment, when I seem to myself to be writing a discourse on the Christian evidences, how do I know but that really I am in my bed dreaming about it? We may talk in this way, I know, about dreams, illusions, visions; but it is certain that to a well-constituted and well-ordered mind it never has occasioned any real doubt or difficulty, nor ever can, in regard to ordinary life; and for the same reason neither ought it to do so in regard to the life of the soul.

Once more. What, according to the doctrine advocated in these pages, shall we reply to those who may affirm that they never had any of our alleged spiritual impressions or perceptions? Precisely what we should to those who might say that they never had any of our alleged moral impressions or perceptions, any sense of justice, or honor, or disinterested benevolence, or natural affection. We should reply, — that we are very sorry for it. If, however, along with their scepticism they evince any love of the truth, any desire or willingness to have their doubts dispelled, any tenderness of conscience or of soul, we may reason with them, and not without some prospect of convincing them that their want of faith is to be ascribed to one or both of the two following causes: either to a vicious or defective development of their nature, or to their insisting on a kind of evidence of which the subject, from its very nature, is not susceptible. Either, from some defect or vice of their peculiar moral constitution or training, they are not prepared to appreciate the only appropriate or possible evidence in the case; or, from ignorance of true philosophy,

they require the sort of evidence for truths addressed to one faculty which is available only in regard to truths addressed to another. By insisting on these topics, it is not improbable that many apparent Atheists may be reclaimed. "In days of crisis and agitation," says an eminent French philosopher, "together with reflection, doubt and scepticism enter into the minds of many excellent men, who sigh over and are affrighted at their own incredulity. I would undertake their defence against themselves; I would prove to them that they always place faith in something. . . . . When the scholar has denied the existence of God, hear the man; ask *him*, take him at unawares, and you will see that all his words imply the idea of God; and that faith in God is, without his knowledge, at the bottom of his heart." \*

As for the rest, the propagandists of atheism, the men who *love* atheism from eccentricity, or misanthropy, or deadness of soul,—I say it with submission, but I say it with the utmost possible confidence in the wisdom of the course, *Let them alone*. Conversion by the ordinary modes of instruction and argument is precluded. Gratify them not with a few short days of that notoriety which they so much covet. Leave them to the natural influences of their system; leave them to the silent disgust which their excesses must awaken in a community not absolutely savage; leave them to the cant and priestcraft of a few ignorant and interested leaders; and it is not, perhaps, entirely past all hope that, in this way, some of them may be so far reclaimed as to become ashamed of their cause, ashamed of one another, and ashamed of themselves.

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\* Cousin's *Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, pp. 179, 180.



Meanwhile, let us hope that a better philosophy than the degrading sensualism, out of which most forms of modern infidelity have grown, will prevail; and that the minds of the rising generation will be thoroughly imbued with it. Let it be a philosophy which recognizes the higher nature of man, and aims in a chastened and reverential spirit to unfold the mysteries of his higher life. Let it be a philosophy which comprehends the soul, — a soul susceptible of religion, of the sublime principle of faith, of a faith which “entereth into that within the veil.” Let it be a philosophy which continually reminds us of our intimate relationship to the spiritual world, which opens to us new sources of strength in temptation, new sources of consolation in trouble, and new sources of life in death, — nay, which teaches us that what we call *death* is but the dying of all that is mortal, that nothing but life may remain. Let it be a philosophy which prepares us to expect extraordinary manifestations of our Heavenly Father’s love and care, and which harmonizes perfectly with the sublime moral purpose and meaning of the Gospel, “casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

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# REMARKS

ON

CREEDS, INTOLERANCE, AND EXCLUSION.

By WILLIAM E. CHANNING, D.D.

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# C R E E D S.

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## R E M A R K S   O N   C R E E D S.

My aversion to human creeds as bonds of Christian union, as conditions of Christian fellowship, as means of fastening chains on men's minds, constantly gains strength.

My first objection to them is, that they separate us from Jesus Christ. To whom am I to go for my knowledge of the Christian religion, but to the Great Teacher, to the Son of God, to him in whom the fulness of the Divinity dwelt? This is my great privilege as a Christian, that I may sit at the feet, not of a human, but divine Master, that I may repair to Him in whom truth lived and spoke without a mixture of error; who was eminently the Wisdom of God and the Light of the world. And shall man dare to interpose between me and my heavenly Guide and Saviour, and prescribe to me the articles of my Christian faith? What is the state of mind in which I shall best learn the truth? It is that in which I forsake all other teachers for Christ, in which my mind is brought nearest to him; it is that in which I lay myself open most entirely to the impressions of his mind. Let me go to Jesus with a human voice sounding in my ears, and telling me what I must hear from the Great Teacher, and how can I listen to him in single-

ness of heart ? All Protestant sects, indeed, tell the learner to listen to Jesus Christ ; but most of them shout around him their own articles so vehemently and imperiously, that the voice of the heavenly Master is wellnigh drowned. He is told to listen to Christ, but told that he will be damned if he receives any lessons but such as are taught in the creed. He is told that Christ's word is alone infallible, but that unless it is received as interpreted by fallible men, he will be excluded from the communion of Christians. This is what shocks me in the creed-maker. He interposes himself between me and my Saviour. He dares not trust me alone with Jesus. He dares not leave me to the word of God. This I cannot endure. The nearest possible communication with the mind of Christ is my great privilege as a Christian. I must learn Christ's truth from Christ himself, as he speaks in the records of his life, and in the men whom he trained up, and supernaturally prepared to be his witnesses to the world. On what ground, I ask, do the creed-makers demand assent to their articles as the condition of church-membership or salvation ? What has conferred on them infallibility ? "Show me your proofs," I say to them, "of Christ speaking in you. Work some miracle. Utter some prophecy. Show me something divine in you, which other men do not possess. Is it possible that you are unaided men like myself, having no more right to interpret the New Testament than myself, and that you yet exalt your interpretations as infallible standards of truth, and the necessary conditions of salvation ? Stand out of my path. I wish to go to the Master. Have you words of greater power than his ? Can you speak to the human conscience or heart in a mightier voice than he ? What is it which *ex*



boldens you to tell me what I must learn of Christ or be lost ? ”

I cannot but look on human creeds with feelings approaching contempt. When I bring them into contrast with the New Testament, into what insignificance do they sink ! What are they ? Skeletons, freezing abstractions, metaphysical expressions of unintelligible dogmas ; and these I am to regard as the expositions of the fresh, living, infinite truth which came from Jesus ! I might with equal propriety be required to hear and receive the lisplings of infancy as the expressions of wisdom. Creeds are to the Scriptures what rushlights are to the sun. The creed-maker defines Jesus in half a dozen lines, perhaps in metaphysical terms, and calls me to assent to this account of my Saviour. I learn less of Christ, by this process, than I should learn of the sun, by being told that this glorious luminary is a circle about a foot in diameter. There is but one way of knowing Christ. We must place ourselves near him, see him, hear him, follow him from his cross to the heavens, sympathize with him and obey him, and thus catch clear and bright glimpses of his divine glory.

Christian truth is infinite. Who can think of shutting it up in a few lines of an abstract creed ? You might as well compress the boundless atmosphere, the fire, the all-pervading light, the free winds of the universe, into separate parcels, and weigh and label them, or break up Christianity into a few propositions. Christianity is freer, more illimitable, than the light or the winds. It is too mighty to be bound down by man's puny hands. It is a spirit, rather than a rigid doctrine, — the spirit of boundless love. The infinite cannot be defined and measured out like a human manufac-

ture. It cannot be reduced to a system. It cannot be comprehended in a set of precise ideas. It is to be felt rather than described. The spiritual impressions which a true Christian receives from the character and teachings of Christ, and in which the chief efficacy of the religion lies, can be poorly brought out in words. Words are but brief, rude hints of a Christian's mind. Its thoughts and feelings overflow them. To those who feel as he does, he can make himself known; for such can understand the tones of the heart; but he can no more lay down his religion in a series of abstract propositions, than he can make known by a few vague terms the expressive features and inmost soul of a much-loved friend. It has been the fault of all sects, that they have been too anxious to define their religion. They have labored to circumscribe the infinite. Christianity, as it exists in the mind of the true disciple, is not made up of fragments, of separate ideas, which he can express in detached propositions. It is a vast and ever-unfolding whole, pervaded by one spirit, each precept and doctrine deriving its vitality from its union with all. When I see this generous, heavenly doctrine compressed and cramped in human creeds, I feel as I should were I to see screws and chains applied to the countenance and limbs of a noble fellow-creature, deforming and destroying one of the most beautiful works of God.

From the infinity of Christian truth, of which I have spoken, it follows that our views of it must always be very imperfect, and ought to be continually enlarged. The wisest theologians are children who have caught but faint glimpses of the religion; who have taken but their first lessons; and whose business it is "to grow in the knowledge of Jesus

Christ." Need I say how hostile to this growth is a fixed creed, beyond which we must never wander? Such a religion as Christ's demands the highest possible activity and freedom of the soul. Every new gleam of light should be welcomed with joy. Every hint should be followed out with eagerness. Every whisper of the divine voice in the soul should be heard. The love of Christian truth should be so intense, as to make us willing to part with all other things for a better comprehension of it. Who does not see that human creeds, setting bounds to thought, and telling us where all inquiry must stop, tend to repress this holy zeal, to shut our eyes on new illumination, to hem us within the beaten paths of man's construction, to arrest that perpetual progress which is the life and glory of an immortal mind?

It is another and great objection to creeds, that, wherever they acquire authority, they interfere with that simplicity and godly sincerity on which the efficacy of religious teaching very much depends. That a minister should speak with power, it is important that he should speak from his own soul, and not studiously conform himself to modes of speaking which others have adopted. It is important that he should give out the truth in the very form in which it presents itself to his mind, in the very words which offer themselves spontaneously as the clothing of his thoughts. To express our own minds frankly, directly, fearlessly, is the way to reach other minds. Now it is the effect of creeds to check this free utterance of thought. The minister must seek words which will not clash with the consecrated articles of his church. If new ideas spring up in his mind, not altogether consonant with what the creedmonger has established, he must cover them with misty language. If he

happen to doubt the standard of his church, he must strain its phraseology, must force it beyond its obvious import, that he may give his assent to it without departures from truth. All these processes must have a blighting effect on the mind and heart. They impair self-respect. They cloud the intellectual eye. They accustom men to tamper with truth. In proportion as a man dilutes his thought, and suppresses his conviction, to save his orthodoxy from suspicion; in proportion as he borrows his words from others, instead of speaking in his own tongue; in proportion as he distorts language from its common use, that he may stand well with his party; in that proportion he clouds and degrades his intellect, as well as undermines the manliness and integrity of his character. How deeply do I commiserate the minister, who, in the warmth and freshness of youth, is visited with glimpses of higher truth than is embodied in the creed, but who dares not be just to himself, and is made to echo what is not the simple, natural expression of his own mind! Better were it for us to beg our bread and clothe ourselves in rags, than to part with Christian simplicity and frankness. Better for a minister to preach in barns or the open air, where he may speak the truth from the fulness of his soul, than to lift up in cathedrals, amidst pomp and wealth, a voice which is not true to his inward thoughts. If they who wear the chains of creeds once knew the happiness of breathing the air of freedom, and of moving with an unencumbered spirit, no wealth or power in the world's gift would bribe them to part with their spiritual liberty.

Another sad effect of creeds is, that they favor unbelief. It is not the object of a creed to express the simple truths of our religion, though in these its efficiency chiefly lies, but



to embody and decree those mysteries about which Christians have been contending. I use the word "mysteries," not in the Scriptural, but popular sense, as meaning doctrines which give a shock to the reason and seem to contradict some acknowledged truth. Such mysteries are the staples of creeds. The celestial virtues of Christ's character, — these are not inserted into articles of faith. On the contrary, doctrines which from their darkness or unintelligibleness have provoked controversy, and which owe their importance very much to the circumstance of having been fought for or fought against for ages, — these are thrown by the creed-makers into the foremost ranks of the religion, and made its especial representatives. Christianity as set forth in creeds is a propounder of dark sayings, of riddles, of knotty propositions, of apparent contradictions. Who, on reading these standards, would catch a glimpse of the simple, pure, benevolent, practical character of Christianity? And what is the result? Christianity, becoming identified, by means of creeds, with so many dark doctrines, is looked on by many as a subject for theologians to quarrel about, but too thorny or perplexed for common minds, while it is spurned by many more as an insult on human reason, as a triumph of fanaticism over common sense.

It is a little remarkable that most creeds, whilst they abound in mysteries of human creation, have renounced the great mystery of religion. There is in religion a great mystery. I refer to the doctrine of Free-will or moral liberty. How to reconcile this with God's foreknowledge and human dependence, is a question which has perplexed the greatest minds. It is probable that much of the obscurity arises from our applying to God the same kind of foreknowl-

edge as men possess by their acquaintance with causes, and from our supposing the Supreme Being to bear the same relation to time as man. It is probable that juster views on these subjects will relieve the freedom of the will from some of its difficulties. Still, the difficulties attending it are great. It is a mystery, in the popular sense of the word. Now is it not strange that theologians, who have made and swallowed so many other mysteries, have generally rejected this, and rejected it on the ground of objections less formidable than those which may be urged against their own inventions? A large part of the Protestant world have sacrificed man's freedom of will to God's foreknowledge and sovereignty, thus virtually subverting all religion, all duty, all responsibility. They have made man a machine, and destroyed the great distinction between him and the brute. There seems a fatality attending creeds. After burdening Christianity with mysteries of which it is as innocent as the unborn child, they have generally renounced the real mystery of religion, of human nature. They have subverted the foundation of moral government, by taking from man the only capacity which makes him responsible, and in this way have fixed on the commands and threatenings of God the character of a cruel despotism. What a lesson against man's attempting to impose his wisdom on his fellow-creatures as the truth of God!

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#### INTOLERANCE AND EXCLUSION.

It is truly astonishing that Christians are not more impressed with the unbecoming spirit, the arrogant style, of

those who deny the Christian character to professed and exemplary followers of Jesus Christ, because they differ in opinion on some of the most subtle and difficult subjects of theology. A stranger, at hearing the language of these denouncers, would conclude, without a doubt, that they were clothed with infallibility, and were appointed to sit in judgment on their brethren. But for myself, I know not a shadow of pretence for the language of superiority assumed by our adversaries. Are they exempted from the common frailty of our nature? Has God given them superior intelligence? Were they educated under circumstances more favorable to improvement than those whom they condemn? Have they brought to the Scriptures more serious, anxious, and unwearied attention? Or do their lives express a deeper reverence for God and for his Son? No. They are fallible, imperfect men, possessing no higher means and no stronger motives for studying the word of God, than their Unitarian brethren. And yet their language to them is virtually this: — “We pronounce you to be in error, and in most dangerous error. We know that we are right, and that you are wrong, in regard to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. You are unworthy the Christian name, and unfit to sit with us at the table of Christ. We offer you the truth, and you reject it at the peril of your souls.” Such is the language of humble Christians to men, who in capacity and apparent piety are not inferior to themselves. This language has spread from the leaders through a considerable part of the community. Men, in those walks of life which leave them without leisure or opportunities for improvement, are heard to decide on the most intricate points, and to pass sentence on men whose lives have been

devoted to the study of the Scriptures. The female, forgetting the tenderness of her sex, and the limited advantages which her education affords for a critical study of the Scriptures, inveighs with bitterness against the damnable errors of such men as Newton, Locke, Clarke, and Price ! The young, too, forget the modesty which belongs to their age, and hurl condemnation on the head which has grown gray in the service of God and mankind. Need I ask whether this spirit of denunciation for supposed error becomes the humble and fallible disciples of Jesus Christ ?

In vindication of this system of exclusion and denunciation, it is often urged, that the "honor of religion," the "purity of the church," and the "cause of truth," forbid those who hold the true Gospel to maintain fellowship with those who support corrupt and injurious opinions. Without stopping to notice the modesty of those who claim an exclusive knowledge of the true Gospel, I would answer, that the "honor of religion" can never suffer by admitting to Christian fellowship men of irreproachable lives, whilst it has suffered most severely from that narrow and uncharitable spirit, which has excluded such men for imagined errors. I answer again, that "the cause of truth" can never suffer by admitting to Christian fellowship men who honestly profess to make the Scriptures their rule of faith and practice, whilst it has suffered most severely by substituting for this standard conformity to human creeds and formularies. It is truly wonderful, if excommunication for supposed error be the method of purifying the church, that the church has been so long and so wofully corrupted. Whatever may have been the deficiencies of Christians in other respects, they have certainly discovered no criminal



reluctance in applying this instrument of purification. Could the thunders and lightnings of excommunication have corrected the atmosphere of the church, not one pestilential vapor would have loaded it for ages. The air of paradise would not have been more pure, more refreshing. But what does history tell us? It tells us, that the spirit of exclusion and denunciation has contributed more than all other causes to the corruption of the church, to the diffusion of error; and has rendered the records of the Christian community as black, as bloody, as revolting to humanity, as the records of empires founded on conquest and guilt.

But it is said, Did not the Apostle denounce the erroneous, and pronounce a curse on the "abettors of another gospel"? This is the stronghold of the friends of denunciation. But let us never forget, that the Apostles were inspired men, capable of marking out with unerring certainty those who substituted "another gospel" for the true. Show us their successors, and we will cheerfully obey them.

It is also important to recollect the character of those men, against whom the Apostolic anathema was directed. They were men who knew distinctly what the Apostles taught, and yet opposed it; and who endeavoured to sow division, and to gain followers, in the churches which the Apostles had planted. These men, resisting the known instructions of the authorized and inspired teachers of the Gospel, and discovering a factious, selfish, mercenary spirit, were justly excluded, as unworthy the Christian name. But what in common with these men have the Christians whom it is the custom of the "Orthodox" to denounce? Do these oppose what they know to be the doctrine of Christ and his Apostles? Do they not revere Jesus and his inspired

messengers? Do they not dissent from their brethren, simply because they believe that their brethren dissent from their Lord? — Let us not forget that the contest at the present day is not between the Apostles themselves and men who oppose their known instructions, but between uninspired Christians, who equally receive the Apostles as authorized teachers of the Gospel, and who only differ in judgment as to the interpretations of their writings. How unjust, then, is it for any class of Christians to confound their opponents with the factious and unprincipled sectarians of the primitive age! Mistake in judgment is the heaviest charge which one denomination has now a right to urge against another; and do we find that the Apostles ever denounced mistake as “awful and fatal hostility” to the Gospel, — that they pronounced anathemas on men who wished to obey, but who misapprehended their doctrines? The Apostles well remembered, that none ever mistook more widely than themselves. They remembered, too, the lenity of their Lord towards their errors, and this lenity they cherished and labored to diffuse.

But it is asked, Have not Christians a right to bear “solemn testimony” against opinions which are “utterly subversive of the Gospel, and most dangerous to men’s eternal interests”? To this I answer, that the opinions of men, who discover equal intelligence and piety with ourselves, are entitled to respectful consideration. If after inquiry they seem erroneous and injurious, we are authorized and bound, according to our ability, to expose, by fair and serious argument, their nature and tendency. But I maintain, that we have no right as individuals, or in an associated capacity to bear our “solemn testimony” against these

opinions by menacing with ruin the Christian who listens to them, or by branding them with the most terrifying epithets for the purpose of preventing candid inquiry into their truth. This is the fashionable mode of "bearing testimony," and it is a weapon which will always be most successful in the hands of the proud, the positive, and overbearing, who are most impatient of contradiction, and have least regard to the rights of their brethren.

But whatever may be the right of Christians as to bearing testimony against opinions which they deem injurious, I deny that they have any right to pass a condemning sentence, on account of these opinions, on the characters of men whose general deportment is conformed to the Gospel of Christ. Both Scripture and reason unite in teaching that the best and only standard of character is the life; and he who overlooks the testimony of a Christian life, and grounds a sentence of condemnation on opinions, about which he as well as his brother may err, violates most flagrantly the duty of just and candid judgment, and opposes the peaceful and charitable spirit of the Gospel. Jesus Christ says: — "By their fruits shall ye know them." "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." "He that heareth and doeth these my sayings," i. e. the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, "I will liken him to a man who built his house upon a rock." It would be easy to multiply similar passages. The whole Scriptures teach us that he and he only is a Christian, whose life is governed by the precepts of the Gospel, and that by this standard alone the professor

of this religion should be tried. We do not deny that our brethren have a right to form a judgment as to our Christian character. But we insist that we have a right to be judged by the fairest, the most approved, and the most settled rules by which character can be tried ; and when these are overlooked, and the most uncertain standard is applied, we are injured ; and an assault on character, which rests on this ground, deserves no better name than defamation and persecution.

I know that this suggestion of persecution will be indignantly repelled by those who deal most largely in denunciation. But persecution is a wrong or injury inflicted for opinions ; and surely assaults on character fall under this definition. Some persons seem to think that persecution consists in pursuing error with fire and sword ; and that therefore it has ceased to exist, except in distempered imaginations, because no class of Christians among us is armed with those terrible weapons. But no. The form is changed, but the spirit lives. Persecution has given up its halter and fagot, but it breathes venom from its lips, and secretly blasts what it cannot openly destroy. For example a Liberal minister, however circumspect in his walk, however irreproachable in all his relations, no sooner avows his honest convictions on some of the most difficult subjects, than his name begins to be a byword. A thousand suspicions are infused into his hearers ; and it is insinuated, that he is a minister of Satan, in " the guise of an angel of light." At a little distance from his home, calumny assumes a bolder tone. He is pronounced an infidel, and it is gravely asked whether he believes in a God. At a greater distance, his morals are assailed. He is a man of the world, ' leading



souls to hell," to gratify the most selfish passions. But notwithstanding all this, he must not say a word about persecution, for reports like these rack no limbs; they do not even injure a hair of his head; and how then is he persecuted? — Now, for myself, I am as willing that my adversary should take my purse or my life, as that he should rob me of my reputation, rob me of the affection of my friends, and of my means of doing good. "He who takes from me my good name" takes the best possession of which human power can deprive me. It is true, that a Christian's reputation is comparatively a light object; and so is his property, so is his life; all are light things to him whose hope is full of immortality. But, of all worldly blessings, an honest reputation is to many of us the most precious; and he who robs us of it is the most injurious of mankind, and among the worst of persecutors. Let not the friends of denunciation attempt to escape this charge, by pleading their sense of duty, and their sincere desire to promote the cause of truth. St. Dominic was equally sincere when he built the Inquisition; and I doubt not that many torturers of Christians have fortified their reluctant minds, at the moment of applying the rack and the burning-iron, by the sincere conviction, that the cause of truth required the sacrifice of its foes. I beg that these remarks may not be applied indiscriminately to the party called "Orthodox," among whom are multitudes whose humility and charity would revolt from making themselves the standards of Christian piety, and from assailing the Christian character of their brethren.

Many other considerations may be added to those which have been already urged, against the system of excluding from Christian fellowship men of upright lives, on account

of their opinions. It necessarily generates perpetual discord in the church. Men differ in opinions as much as in features. No two minds are perfectly accordant. The shades of belief are infinitely diversified. Amidst this immense variety of sentiment, every man is right in his own eyes. Every man discovers errors in the creed of his brother. Every man is prone to magnify the importance of his own peculiarities, and to discover danger in the peculiarities of others. This is human nature. Every man is partial to his own opinions, because they are his own, and his self-will and pride are wounded by contradiction. Now what must we expect, when beings so erring, so divided in sentiment, and so apt to be unjust to the views of others, assert the right of excluding one another from the Christian church on account of imagined error? As the Scriptures confine this right to no individual and to no body of Christians, it belongs alike to all; and what must we expect, when Christians of all capacities and dispositions, the ignorant, prejudiced, and self-conceited, imagine it their duty to prescribe opinions to Christendom, and to open or to shut the door of the church according to the decision which their neighbours may form on some of the most perplexing points of theology? This question, unhappily, has received answer upon answer in ecclesiastical history. We there see Christians denouncing and excommunicating one another for supposed error, until every denomination has been pronounced accursed by some portion of the Christian world; so that, were the curses of men to prevail, not one human being would enter heaven. To me it appears, that to plead for the right of excluding men of blameless lives, on account of their opinions, is to sound the peal of perpetual and universal war. . . . .

Another argument against this practice of denouncing the supposed errors of sincere professors of Christianity is this. It exalts to supremacy in the church men who have the least claim to influence. Humble, meek, and affectionate Christians are least disposed to make creeds for their brethren, and to denounce those who differ from them. On the contrary, the impetuous, proud, and enthusiastic men who cannot or will not weigh the arguments of opponents are always most positive and most unsparing in denunciation. These take the lead in a system of exclusion. They have no false modesty, no false charity, to shackle their zeal in framing fundamentals for their brethren, and in punishing the obstinate in error. The consequence is, that creeds are formed which exclude from Christ's church some of his truest followers, which outrage reason as well as revelation, and which subsequent ages are obliged to mutilate and explain away, lest the whole religion be rejected by men of reflection. Such has been the history of the church. It is strange that we do not learn wisdom from the past. What man, who feels his own fallibility, who sees the errors into which the positive and "orthodox" of former times have been betrayed, and who considers his own utter inability to decide on the degree of truth which every mind, of every capacity, must receive in order to salvation, will not tremble at the responsibility of prescribing to his brethren, in his own words, the views they must maintain on the most perplexing subjects of religion? Humility will always leave this work to others.

Another important consideration is, that this system of excluding men of apparent sincerity, for their opinions, entirely subverts free inquiry into the Scriptures. When

once a particular system is surrounded by this bulwark, when once its defenders have brought the majority to believe that the rejection of it is a mark of depravity and perdition, what but the name of liberty is left to Christians? The obstacles to inquiry are as real, and may be as powerful, as in the neighbourhood of the Inquisition. The multitude dare not think, and the thinking dare not speak. The right of private judgment may thus, in a Protestant country, be reduced to a nullity. It is true that men are sent to the Scriptures; but they are told before they go, that they will be driven from the church on earth and in heaven, unless they find in the Scriptures the doctrines which are embodied in the popular creed. They are told, indeed, to inquire for themselves; but they are also told at what points inquiry must arrive; and the sentence of exclusion hangs over them, if they happen to stray, with some of the best and wisest men, into forbidden paths. Now this "Protestant liberty" is, in one respect, more irritating than Papal bondage. It mocks as well as enslaves us. It talks to us courteously as friends and brethren, whilst it rivets our chains. It invites and even charges us to look with our own eyes, but with the same breath warns us against seeing any thing which Orthodox eyes have not seen before us. Is this a state of things favorable to serious inquiry into the truths of the Gospel? yet how long has the church been groaning under this cruel yoke!



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FIDELITY IN DUTY,  
  
NOT  
  
ACCURACY IN BELIEF,  
  
OUR  
  
TEST OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

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BY ANDREW P. PEABODY.

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BOSTON:  
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## FIDELITY IN DUTY, ETC.

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A PLAIN New York farmer thus illustrated the condition of the religious world, "When I carry my wheat to Albany to market," said he, "my neighbors, some tell me, I must go by this road, others, by that, -- some say, that I must go by land, others, that I must take the canal; and they all talk as if every thing depended on my going their way; but, when I get to Albany, they never ask me which way I came, but only whether my wheat is good." It is with the church on earth, as it was with this honest man's neighbors. Great stress is laid on the way, the merely doctrinal and ritual way, in which men walk to Heaven. Every man is showing some little, narrow, walled in by-path of his own as the only true way. But at the journey's end, I apprehend that the only question will be, whether our wheat is good, — that all the

good wheat, on whatever road it came, will be gathered into the Lord's garner, and the chaff and tares only given over to burning.

This good farmer, whom I have quoted, was a liberal Christian, — and his homely illustration comprises the only creed, the only bond of union of those, who bear the name of liberal Christians. We, to be sure, are called Unitarians; and, so far as a common belief in the undivided unity of God goes, we are Unitarians. But we do not consider this appellation as belonging exclusively to ourselves; for among professed Trinitarians there are very many, whose definitions and explanations of the Trinity amount to a denial of it, while in our own ranks are some, whose doctrinal sentiments are very nearly allied to those of our opponents and denouncers. We do not pretend to any degree of uniformity of faith. We differ widely among ourselves in matters of speculation. We have no party Shibboleth. But we agree in owning good wheat to be good, on whatever road it comes. We agree in making fidelity in duty, not accuracy of belief, our test of the Christian character. And it is on this point chiefly, that we regard ourselves as differing from our fellow-Christians. They lay a stress, which we do not, on creeds and forms. They cannot own the heart to be right, where they think the head wrong.

We, Unitarians, are accused of utter indifference on the subject of faith, — of maintaining that it is no matter what a man believes. This is by no means the case. All truth is sanctifying; and the more correct our faith, the firmer will be our principles of duty. But we regard no particular doctrine or set of doctrines as essential. Yet there is one essential, and that is an honest mind, —



mind faithful in its search after truth, fearless in following the guidance of reason and inspiration, true to its own convictions. He, who is afraid to investigate, or too indolent to inquire into the deep things of God, or too much the slave of public opinion to receive the dawnings of new light, lacks this great essential; and even were his creed perfectly sound, he would hold the truth in unrighteousness, and it would be counted to him as error. He, on the other hand, who has honestly used his powers of research and means of knowledge, who has sought the truth to the best of his ability, need not fear that he has embraced any fatal error, but may hope with unwavering confidence for final salvation, if he be only diligent in duty and fervent in spirit.

My object in the present discourse is to show you, that, in judging of our own religious characters, and those of our brethren, the chief stress should be laid, not on modes of faith, but on the frame of heart and the habits of life.

I first remark that, with regard to modes of faith, the Bible and the Church are entirely at issue. This church has its five points, that, its thirty-nine articles;—here there is a creed full of dark subtleties, there a covenant, by which a man enters into a contract with his Maker to believe an indigestible mass of the metaphysics of the dark ages. And these standards are made a Procrustes's bed, to which every mind, great or small, must adapt its dimensions, or forego admission to Heaven. But what says the Bible?—A word of all this? By no means. One of the first things, that strikes us on turning over its pages, is the strictly practical character of its requisitions. It is the least technical book in the world. It makes no attempt at giving a system of theology. The longest

erced that it contains is, that Jesus is God's anointed. Its precepts of duty, its motives to holiness occupy the foreground, while for doctrinal subtleties recourse must be had to dim and doubtful inference. Its promises are not to the expounders of dark sentences, to those who know all mysteries and have all faith; but to the pure in heart, the poor in spirit, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who do the will of God. Nor among all the warnings against perdition, of which the holy word is full, is honest misbelief once spoken of as one of the shoals, on which we are liable to make a shipwreck of our salvation. Now the Bible is not the faithful chart of the heavenward voyage that it pretends to be, if this shoal lies on the way without being marked down. If honest error could bar a man out of heaven, I know that God would have told us so, and not left us to find it out for the first time at the judgment seat of Christ.

Another reason for believing that no particular mode of faith can be essential to salvation lies in the very nature of faith. Faith is involuntary. We cannot believe what we will, but only what we see evidence for. We irresistibly yield our assent to the preponderance of argument, and often find ourselves forced to believe what we had rather not find true. I cannot help believing as I do. My neighbor, who denounces my faith, cannot help believing as he does. We have both of us diligently sought for the truth, searched the Scriptures, weighed opposing views and arguments, and have in some respects reached opposite results. Our wills have been equally good. We are equally sincere. We have done all we could to believe right. And is it possible that he will be rewarded and I punished eternally, for having involuntarily arrived at

contrary conclusions? This is making our future happiness or misery to depend, not on our holiness or guilt, but on our mere good or ill fortune. If God has designed that our final destiny should turn solely on our skill in interpreting the Bible, that holy book would have been so penned as to leave no room for involuntary and honest error. As it now stands, giving fair ground for different inquiries with equal sincerity to put opposite interpretations upon its records, if the accuracy of a man's interpretations is to fix his fate for eternity, the Bible, so far from being a display of God's mercy, is a cruel gift, a fatal treasure, a tyrant's bribe to ruin. If I cannot be saved without believing that Jesus is equal with God, it was a wanton trifling with my undying soul for Jesus to have said, "The Father is greater than I." We are told, indeed, that there is a double meaning to these words, that they involve an enigma, which the faithful alone can solve. But all the aspects of nature must change, and all the brighter and clearer pages of Scripture must be blotted out before I can believe that the God of Nature and of the Bible has made my salvation turn on the solving of an enigma. If penitence for Adam's sin is an essential part of that godly sorrow, without which we cannot enter Christ's kingdom, it was unspeakably cruel, it was idle mockery of the unwary and confiding reader, for it to have been written in the book of life, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father." Nor is it of any avail to tell us, as some of our brethren of other creeds do, that these things are *spiritually* discerned, that they are made visible by special divine illumination, and that *they* have within them the testimony of the spirit that their doctrines are true. We would humbly trust that we are not utterly

destitute of spiritual discernment. Nor are we without the strongest inward testimony to what we regard as the truth in Jesus. We find it competent to sustain us in the spirit's most trying emergencies, in bereavement, sickness, and at the gates of death. We find that it can cheer the path of self-denying duty, that it can inspire the prayer of faith, and prompt to the labor of love.

Another consideration, that demonstrates modes of faith to be unessential, is that some of the most beautiful and finished specimens of the Christian character are to be found among those, who could not be said to have any distinctive faith on subjects of controversy. I have seen the lone widow, who had eaten all her days the bread of penury, who had been buffeted by all the storms of life, — all its waves and billows had passed over her. Chronic infirmity, palsy, age came upon her. She seemed singled out for the keenest shafts of sorrow. Yet the word of God was through life her refuge, and her strong tower. It was never from her side, and always filled her mouth with praise, and her heart with gladness. As she talked of its blessed disclosures, her dim eye would kindle, her wan face would glow, she would forget the elements of discomfort all around her, and speak and feel as if she were God's most favored child. Her ceaseless theme was the goodness of her heavenly Father; her constant cry to those about her, "Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." The most exclusive sectarian in the world could not have been in her society without owning that she was a Christian. And she died as she had lived. She fell sweetly asleep in Jesus, with words of triumph on her shrivelled lips, and her withered hands clasped in gratitude for her release



from life's long labor. A halo of celestial light seemed to dwell about her cottage and her death-bed. When with her, you felt that you were in a holier presence, and with one much nearer heaven than the rest of her fellow-pilgrims. Yet she knew nothing of technical theology. She did not know, and could not be made to understand the difference between the divers sects about her. She considered all as Christians, who breathe a Christian spirit; and to her dying day, it was a mystery to her why they all could not extend to each other the sympathy and love, in which she embraced them all. I am very certain that she would not have known the meaning of such words and phrases as *Trinity, election, vicarious atonement, hereditary depravity*, and the like. And certain am I, that she never received or rejected the doctrines which they imply. These questions never occurred to her mind. She could not have understood any of the complex creeds, of which the church is full. Her religion seemed to be comprehended in these few simple axioms: I have a Father in heaven, who is always with me, and whose presence I can always feel, who seems even nearer to me in darkness than in light, — in trouble than in joy: I have a Saviour, who showed his love in suffering and dying for me, who loves me still, and will welcome me to heaven: I have a home reserved for me in my Father's house above, not because I merit it, for I am but a poor sinner, but because he is too good to cast away any that come to him.

Now this is not a solitary case; but the representative of a very large class. I have known scores of such cases, and so has every minister of the gospel. Thousands of such Christians have there been in every section and age

of the church, who have borne on their careworn brows the bright seal of adoption, whose light has shone in the dark places of penury and distress, who have glorified their Father and their Saviour in the most bitter allotments of want, pain, and woe, who have lived and died in the very odor of sanctity and breath of heaven. In the judgment, shall all these holy and humble of heart be turned by, because they cannot say their creeds or understand their catechisms? I know that they will not. I can doubt, and fear, and tremble for myself, and for those, who, like myself, are surrounded by so many secondary supports, aids, and comforts, that we may have leaned upon these, when we have seemed to lean upon the Rock of Ages. But for those, to whom life has been as a bare, naked wilderness, with only this one eternal rock for their shelter, or as a wave-tossed ocean, with God's unfailing word for their only beacon light,—for those, who have been stripped of all else, and thrown wholly upon the love and faithfulness of their God, I cannot harbor a doubt. And yet these, the exclusive sectarian, if consistent with himself, must cut off from heaven; for not one of them can say his shibboleth. He cuts off all the poor and ignorant, the weary and heavy laden, the despised and rejected of men, the very souls to whom the gospel is richest in promise, whom Jesus came especially to seek and save.

I would yet further infer that peculiar modes of faith are unessential from the very nature of the points in controversy. They have no *direct* reference to practice, no necessary bearing upon the heart and conduct. There is a virtual agreement in all, that pertains to the motives, duties, and rewards of the Christian life. Persons of op-

posite theories cherish the same practical views, the same sentiments of devotion, the same principles of piety. Thus, for instance, we, Christians, all agree in admitting the fact of human depravity, and the necessity of repentance and regeneration; nor is there the slightest difference among us with regard to the nature, evidence, or fruits of regeneration. But we differ about the origin of sin. Some of us believe that we inherit a sinful nature, and are accountable for our first parent's transgressions; others that we are not sinners till we begin to sin, and that we have no one's sins but our own to answer for. But I cannot conceive how this difference can affect feeling or conduct. Were we to believe that the sins, not only of Adam, but of the whole universe, were imputed to us, we yet could repent of no more than we are conscious of, we could be conscious of no more than we had committed, and we are at best conscious of guilt enough to demand a life-long flow of contrite sorrow. — So, too, we all agree in regarding heaven as the gift of God's free grace, without any constraining merit on our part, and we look to Jesus as the messenger of God's grace and the author of our salvation. The only difference is about certain preliminary negotiations in the courts of heaven between the Father and the Son, which, some say, were first adjusted, and for which others can find no proof. But on either ground, our obligation to love and gratitude remains the same. On either ground, all is free mercy on heaven's part, all undeserving helplessness and misery on ours. So with regard to the atonement, we all agree that it is through the benign agency of Jesus, that we are rescued from the evils and woes of sin, and that in the work of our redemption he is the All in all, the First and



the Last. And can it make us one whit more or less grateful to him, to know whether the shaft, which he averted from us, pierced his own side? — So too with regard to the person of Jesus, we all agree in receiving him as the Emmanuel, as the incarnation of the divine attributes; we look upon his works as God's works, his words as God's words, his spirit as God's spirit. When we contemplate him, it is to all of us as if we saw God face to face. What possible-practical effect can flow from our metaphysical notions as to his nature? What difference can it make, whether we regard his divinity as essential and innate, or as derived and indwelling? In this way we might review all the points of controversy, and should be at a loss to understand how any of them could have a decisive bearing upon character, and thus upon salvation.

And when we take a survey of the Christian world, we must look with thoroughly jaundiced eyes, unless we can trace, under every variety of form and creed, those who fear God and work righteousness. When we mentally call over the roll of Christ's elect, the names of Catholics and Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists, Trinitarians and Unitarians, come up side by side. Every sect has given God fervent worshippers, man faithful servants, truth and virtue noble and fearless champions, piety stainless and glowing exemplars. Every sect has had its peacemakers and its martyrs, its holy in life, its resigned in sorrow, its happy and triumphant in death. And we cannot but trust that from each and all God has been making up his jewels, and that the pious sectarian will embrace with rapture at the portals of heaven hosts of his God-serving fellow-pilgrims, whom, less in anger than in sorrow, he had here ignorantly and rashly consigned to



perdition. And if good men are thus to meet in heaven, why cannot they so meet on earth? So long as modes of faith are made the test of character, there can be no union. Let all who do their Father's will be regarded as heirs of the kingdom, then will the church on earth become one family, as are the saints above. Thus may the Catholic, with his pompous ritual, and the Quaker, in his primitive simplicity, thus may he who numbers a hundred articles in his creed, and he who is strong in the simple faith that Jesus is the Christ, thus may men of every nation, clime, and tongue, be united in one holy brotherhood. Nor is this brotherhood confined to the church. Jesus has sheep, who are not of his fold. If in any heathen land there be one, who has turned away from fraud and violence, who has done justice and loved mercy, and walked humbly before the God, whom he has heard in the evening breeze, or beheld in the glow of nature, or felt in the deep workings of his own spirit, he has done the will of his Father in heaven, and belongs to the Christian family. If there be a Jew, who, with contrite heart mourns for the desolation of Zion, and prays for the peace of Jerusalem, and serves the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he, too, as a doer of God's will belongs to the household of the Saviour, whom his brethren set at nought. If faith be the standard, the devout Pagan, the pious Jew are reprobates; but if those who do God's will shall enter his kingdom, they are heirs of that kingdom.

I have as yet taken but a one-sided view of the doctrine before us. I have drawn out the considerations, which it suggests with regard to the unessential moment of

modes of faith or forms of profession. But it proposes a thorough and heart-searching test of fitness for heaven; and to this must I devote the few remaining moments for which I can claim your attention. "He that doeth the will of my Father, he shall enter the kingdom." Though I mourn over the prevalence of a sectarian spirit, on account of the bitter fountains of jealousy and unkindness that flow from it, I mourn for it yet more as turning away men's minds from what should be the great and all absorbing aim of life,—the cultivation of the character. It is still as it was in the Saviour's time, many are inquiring, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" when they should themselves be giving heed to the exhortation, "Strive to enter in at the straight gate." Many are anxious about faith, when they should be busy in spiritual culture. Brethren, if you do your Father's will, you shall know of his doctrine. By works shall faith be made perfect. "*Whosoever doeth the will of my Father,*" not outwardly and mechanically, like a spiritless machine, turned and set in motion by some extraneous power; but inwardly, heartily, lovingly. When we propose obedience as the test of character, we mean not external obedience, *mere morality*, as it is sometimes sneeringly called; but obedience in all their depth, compass, and spirituality to those two great laws of the inner man, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself." This do, and thou shalt live; yea, live, though the outward form of godliness under which thou wert nurtured be utterly blasted, though thy creed perish in the day of trial, though thy speculations vanish into thin air before the first rays of eternity's light. Thou shalt live, because thou hast life in thyself,—the life of

God within thee, his breath in thy soul, his spirit in thy heart.

I cannot but apprehend that we, Unitarians, should peculiarly take home to ourselves the warning to be doers of our heavenly Father's will, instead of merely saying, Lord, Lord. We are too apt to glory in our freedom from antiquated error and our simple and accurate views of truth, without remembering how much these things enhance our responsibilities. Brethren, if we have a purer faith, we are bound to show it by our works, by a brighter piety and a more comprehensive charity. Where much is given, much will be required; and, if our hearts and lives are none the better for our belief, the correctness of our creed will only aggravate our guilt, and make our condemnation greater. Here lies our great danger. Every thing seems plain and easy. Mists are brushed away, metaphysical subtleties put to flight. He that runneth may read. The way is so plain that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." We can see all along the straight path to heaven. As we stand at its entrance, we can trace every step till it loses itself in the celestial city. But the path that lies so plain before us, and is open night and day, we feel that we can enter upon at any time, and are too apt to postpone it to the last moment, when the mists of age or death so becloud our sight, that we stumble even on a smooth way, and wander from a straight road. Be it not so with us, brethren. Let us not stand, like senseless guide-boards, pointing the way we will not tread. But let us show that ours is a doctrine according to godliness, by bringing forth most abundantly the fruits of a godly life.

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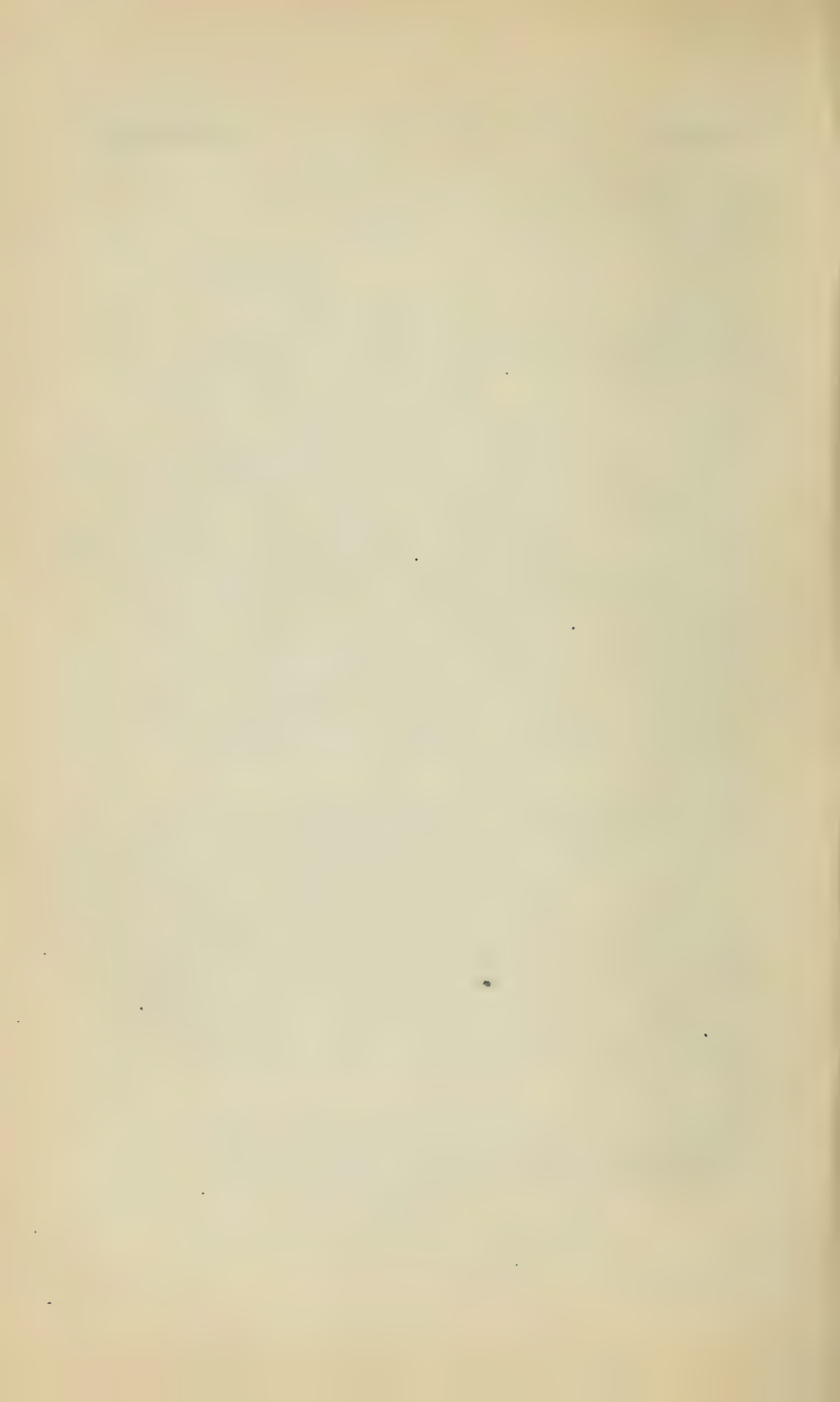
# DISCOURSE ON THE CHURCH

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BY WILLIAM E. CHANNING, D. D.

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION:  
B O S T O N.



## DISCOURSE ON THE CHURCH.

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### MATTHEW VII. 21 — 27.

Not every man that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

THESE words, which form the conclusion of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, teach a great truth, namely, that there is but one thing essential in religion, and this is the doing of God's will, the doing of those sayings or precepts of Christ which constitute the substance of that memorable discourse.

We learn that it will avail us nothing to call Christ, Lord, Lord, to profess ourselves his disciples, to hear his words, to teach his name, to take our place in his Church, or even to do wonderful works or miracles in attestation of his truth, if we neglect to cherish the spirit and virtues of his religion. God heeds not what we say, but what we are and what we do. The subjection of our wills to the Divine ; the mortification of sensual and selfish propensities ; the cultivation of supreme love to God, and of universal justice and charity towards our neighbour ; this, this is the very essence of religion ; this, alone, places us on a rock ; this is the end, the supreme and ultimate good, and is to be prized and sought above all other things.

This is a truth as simple as it is grand. The child can understand it ; and yet men, in all ages, have contrived to overlook it ; have contrived to find substitutes for purity of heart and life ; have hoped by some other means to commend themselves to God, to enter the kingdom of heaven. Forms, creeds, churches, the priesthood, the sacraments, — these and other things have been exalted into supremacy. The grand and only qualification for heaven, that which in itself is heaven, the virtue and the spirit of Jesus Christ, has been obscured, depreciated ; whilst assent to certain mysteries or union with certain churches has been thought the narrow way that leads to life. I have not time in a single discourse to expose all the delusions which have spread on this subject. I shall confine myself to one, which is not limited to the past, but too rife in our own times.

There has always existed, and still exists, a disposition to attach undue importance to “the church” which a man belongs to. To be a member of the “true Church,” has been insisted on as essential to human salvation. Multitudes



have sought comfort, and not seldom found their ruin, in the notion that they were embraced in the motherly arms of "the true Church," for with this they have been satisfied. Professed Christians have fought about "the Church" as if it were a matter of life and death. The Roman Catholic shuts the gate of heaven on you, because you will not enter his "church." Among the Protestants are those who tell you, that the promises of Christianity do not belong to you, be your character what it may, unless you receive the Christian ordinances from the ministers of their church. Salvation is made to flow through a certain priesthood, through an hereditary order, through particular rites, administered by consecrated functionaries. Even among denominations in which such exclusive claims are not set up, you will still meet the idea, that a man is safer in their particular church than elsewhere; so that something distinct from Christian purity of heart and life is made the way of salvation.

This error I wish to expose. I wish to show, that Christ's spirit, Christ's virtue, "the doing of the Sermon on the Mount," is the great end of our religion, the only essential thing, and that all other things are important only as ministering to this. I know, indeed, that very many acknowledge the doctrine now expressed. But too often their conviction is not deep and living, and it is impaired by superstitious notions of some mysterious saving influence in the Church, or in some other foreign agency. To meet these erroneous tendencies, I shall not undertake to prove in a formal way, by logical process, the supreme importance, blessedness, and glory of righteousness, of sanctity, of love towards God and man, or to prove that nothing else is indispensable. This truth shines by its own light. It runs through the whole New Testament; and is a gospel written in the soul by a divine hand. To vindicate

it against the claims set up for the Church, nothing is needed but to offer a few plain remarks in the order in which they rise up of themselves to my mind.

I begin with the remark, that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said nothing about the Church; nor do we find him or his disciples laying down anywhere a definite plan for its organization, or a ritual for its worship. Nor ought this to surprise us. It was the very thing to be expected in such a religion as Christianity. Judaism was intended to educate a particular nation, half civilized, and surrounded with the grossest idolatry, and accordingly it hedged them in by multiplied and rigid forms. But Christianity proposes as its grand aim, to spread the inward spiritual worship of God through all nations, in all stages of society, under all varieties of climate, government, and condition, and such a religion cannot be expected to confine itself to any particular outward shape. Especially when we consider, that it is destined to endure through all ages, to act on all, to blend itself with new forms of society and with the highest improvements of the race, it cannot be expected to ordain an immutable mode of administration, but must leave its modes of worship and communion to conform themselves silently and gradually to the wants and progress of humanity. The rites and arrangements which suit one period, lose their significance or efficiency in another. The forms which minister to the mind now may fetter it hereafter, and must give place to its free unfolding. A system wanting this freedom and flexibility would carry strong proof in itself of not having been intended for universality. It is one proof of Christ's having come to "inherit all nations," that he did not institute for all nations and all times a precise machinery of forms and outward rules, that he entered into no minute legislation as to the worship and

government of his Church, but left these outward concerns to be swayed by the spirit and progress of successive ages. Of consequence, no particular order of the church can be essential to salvation. No church can pretend, that its constitution is defined and ordained in the Scriptures so plainly and undeniably, that whoever forsakes it gives palpable proof of a spirit of disobedience to God. All churches are embraced by their members with equal religious reverence, and this assures us, that in all God's favor may be equally obtained.

It is worthy of remark, that, from the necessity of the case, the Church assumed at first a form which it could not long retain. It was governed by the Apostles who had founded it, men who had known Christ personally, and received his truth from his lips, and witnessed his resurrection, and were enriched above all men by the miraculous illuminations and aids of his spirit. These presided over the Church with an authority peculiar to themselves, and to which none after them could, with any reason, pretend. They understood "the mind of Christ," as none could do but those who had enjoyed so long and close an intimacy with him; and not only were they sent forth with miraculous powers, but by imposition of their hands similar gifts of the Spirit were conferred on others. This presence of inspired Apostles and supernatural powers gave to the primitive Church obvious and important distinctions, separating it widely from the form which it was afterwards to assume. Of this we have a remarkable proof in a passage of Paul, in which he sets before us the offices or functions exercised in the original Church. "God hath set in the church apostles, prophets, teachers, gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."\* Now, of all

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\* 1 Cor. xii. 28.

these endowments or offices, one only, that of teacher, remains in our day. The Apostles, the founders and heroes of the primitive Church, with their peculiar powers, have vanished, leaving as their representatives their writings, to be studied alike by all. Teachers remain, not because they existed in the first age, but because their office, from its nature and from the condition of human nature, is needed still. The office, however, has undergone an important change. At first the Christian teacher enjoyed immediate communication with the Apostles, and received miraculous aids, and thus enjoyed means of knowledge possessed by none of his successors. The Christian minister now can only approach the Apostles as other men do, that is, through the Gospels and Epistles which they have left us ; and he has no other aid from above in interpreting them than every true Christian enjoys. The promise of the Holy Spirit, that greatest of promises, is made without distinction to every man, of every office or rank, who perseveringly implores the Divine help, and this establishes an essential equality among all. Whether teachers are to continue in the brighter ages which prophecy announces, is rendered doubtful by a very striking prediction of the times of the Messiah. "In those days," saith the Lord, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest." \* Is it possible that any man, with a clear comprehension of the peculiarity of the primitive Church, can look back to this as an immutable form and rule, can regard any

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\* Jeremiah xxxi. 33, 34.



church form as essential to salvation, can ascribe to outward ordinances, so necessarily fluctuating, an importance to be compared with that which belongs to the immutable, everlasting distinctions of holiness and virtue ?

The Church, as at first constituted, presents interesting and beautiful aspects. It was not a forced and arbitrary, but free spontaneous union. It grew out of the principles and feelings of human nature. Our nature is social. We cannot live alone. We cannot shut up any great feeling in our hearts. We seek for others to partake it with us. The full soul finds at once relief and strength in sympathy. This is especially true in religion, the most social of all our sentiments, the only universal bond on earth. In this law of our nature, the Christian Church had its origin. Christ did not establish it in a formal way. If you consult the New Testament, you do not find Jesus or his Apostles setting about the task of forming an artificial organization of the first disciples. Read, in the book of Acts, the simple, touching narratives of the union of the first converts. They were of one heart and one soul. They could not be kept asunder. The new truth melted them into one mass ; knit them into one body. In their mutual love, they could not withhold from one another their possessions, but had all things in common. Blessed unity ! a type of that oneness and harmony which a purer Christianity is to spread through all nations. Among those early converts, the most gifted and enlightened were chosen to be teachers in public assemblies. To these assemblies the brotherhood repaired with eagerness, to hear expositions of the new faith, to strengthen one another's loyalty to Christ, and to be open witnesses of him in the world. In their meetings they were left very much to follow the usages of the synagogue, in which they had been brought up ; so little did

Christianity trouble itself about forms. How simple, how natural, this association ! It is no mystery. It grew out of the plainest wants of the human heart. The religious sentiment, the spirit of love towards God and man, awakened afresh by Christ, craved for a new union through which to find utterance and strength. And shall this church union, the growth of the Christian spirit, and so plainly subordinate to it, usurp its place, or in any way detract from its sole sufficiency, from its supreme, unrivalled glory ?

The Church, according to its true idea and purpose, is an association of sincere, genuine followers of Christ ; and at first, this idea was, in a good degree, realized. The primitive disciples were drawn to Christ by conviction. They met together and confessed him, not from usage, fashion, or education, but in opposition to all these. In that age, profession and practice, the form and the spirit, the reality and the outward signs of religion, went together. But with the growth of the Church, its life declined ; its great idea was obscured ; the name remained, and sometimes little more than the name. It is a remarkable fact, that the very spirit to which Christianity is most hostile, the passion for power, dominion, pomp, and preëminence, struck its deepest roots in the Church. The Church became the very stronghold of the lusts and vices which Christianity most abhors. Accordingly, its history is one of the most melancholy records of past times. It is sad enough to read the blood-stained annals of worldly empires ; but when we see the spiritual kingdom of Christ, a prey for ages to usurping popes, prelates, or sectarian chiefs, inflamed with bigotry and theological hate and the lust of rule, and driven by these fires of hell to grasp the temporal sword, to persecute, torture, imprison, butcher their brethren, to mix with and embitter national wars, and

to convulse the whole Christian world, we experience a deeper gloom, and are more tempted to despair of our race. History has not a darker page, than that which records the persecutions of the Albigenses, or the horrors of the Inquisition. And when we come to later times, the Church wears any thing rather than holiness inscribed on her front. How melancholy to a Christian the history lately given us by Ranke, of the reaction of Catholicism against Protestantism. Throughout, we see the ecclesiastical powers resorting to force as the grand instrument of conversion; thus proving their alliance, not with heaven, but with earth and hell. If we take broad views of the Church in any age or land, how seldom do we see the prevalence of true sanctity! How many of its ministers preach for lucre or display, preach what they do not believe, or deny their doctrines in their lives! How many congregations are there, made up in a great degree of worldly men and women, who repair to the house of God from usage, or for propriety's sake, or from a vague notion of being saved, not from thirst for the divine spirit, not from a fulness of heart, which longs to pour itself forth in prayer and praise! Such is the Church. We are apt, indeed, to make it an abstraction, or to separate it in our thoughts from the individuals who compose it; and thus it becomes to us a holy thing, and we ascribe to it strange powers. Theologians speak of it as a unity, a mighty whole, one and the same in all ages; and in this way the imagination is cheated into the idea of its marvellous sanctity and grandeur. But we must separate between the theory or the purpose of the Church, and its actual state. When we come down to facts, we see it to be, not a mysterious, immutable unity, but a collection of fluctuating, divided, warring individuals, who bring into it, too often, hearts and hands any



thing but pure. Painful as it is, we must see things as they are ; and so doing, we cannot but be struck with the infinite absurdity of ascribing to such a Church mysterious powers, of supposing that it can confer holiness on its members, or that the circumstance of being joined to it is of the least moment in comparison with purity of heart and life.

Purity of heart and life, Christ's spirit of love towards God and man ; this is all in all. This is the only essential thing. The Church is important only as it ministers to this, and every church which so ministers is a good one, no matter how, when, or where it grew up, no matter whether it worship on its knees or on its feet, or whether its ministers are ordained by pope, bishop, presbyter, or people ; these are secondary things, and of no comparative moment. The church which opens on heaven is that, and that only, in which the spirit of heaven dwells. The church whose worship rises to God's ear is that, and that only, where the soul ascends. No matter whether it be gathered in cathedral or barn ; whether it sit in silence or send up a hymn ; whether the minister speak from carefully prepared notes, or from immediate, fervent, irrepressible suggestion. If God be loved, and Jesus Christ be welcomed to the soul, and his instructions be meekly and wisely heard, and the solemn purpose grow up to do all duty amidst all conflict, sacrifice, and temptation, then the true end of the church is answered. "This is no other than the house of God, the gate of heaven."

In these remarks, I do not mean that all churches are of equal worth. Some, undoubtedly, correspond more than others to the spirit and purpose of Christianity, to the simple usages of the primitive disciples, and to the principles of human nature. All have their superstitions and corruptions, but some are more pure than the rest ; and we are bound to



seek that which is purest, which corresponds most with the Divine will. As far as we have power to select, we should go to the church where we shall be most helped to become devout, disinterested, and morally strong. Our salvation, however, does not depend on our finding the best church on earth, for this may be distant or unknown. Amidst diversities of administrations, there is the same spirit. In all religious societies professing Christ as their Lord, the plainest, grandest truths of religion will almost certainly be taught, and some souls may be found touched and enlightened from above. This is a plain, undeniable fact. In all sects, various as they are, good and holy men may be found; nor can we tell in which the holiest have grown up. The church, then, answers its end in all; for its only end is to minister to human virtue. It is delightful to read in the records of all denominations the lives of eminent Christians, who have given up every thing for their religion, who have been faithful unto death, who have shed around them the sweet light and fragrance of Christian hope and love. We cannot, then, well choose amiss, if we choose the church which, as it seems to us, best represents the grand ideas of Christ, and speaks most powerfully to our consciences and hearts. This church, however, we must not choose for our brother. He differs from us probably in temperament, in his range of intellect, or in the impressions which education and habit have given him. Perhaps the worship which most quickens you and me, may hardly keep our neighbour awake. He must be approached through the heart and imagination; we through the reason. What to him is fervor passes with us for noise. What to him is an imposing form is to us vain show. Condemn him not. If in his warmer atmosphere he builds up a stronger faith in God and a more steadfast choice of perfect

goodness than ourselves, his church is better to him than ours to us.

One great error in regard to churches contributes to the false estimate of them as essential to salvation. We imagine that the church, the minister, the worship, can do something for us mechanically; that there are certain mysterious influences in what we call a holy place, which may act on us without our own agency. It is not so. The church and the minister can do little for us in comparison with what we must do for ourselves, and nothing for us without ourselves. They become to us blessings through our own activity. Every man must be his own priest. It is his own action, not the minister's, it is the prayer issuing from his own heart, not from another's lips, which aids him in the church. The church does him good, only as by its rites, prayers, hymns, and sermons, it wakes up his spirit to think, feel, pray, praise, and resolve. The church is a help, not a force. It acts on us by rational and moral means, and not by mystical operations. Its influence resembles precisely that which is exerted out of church. Its efficiency depends chiefly on the clearness, simplicity, sincerity, love, and zeal with which the minister speaks to our understandings, consciences, and hearts; just as in common life we are benefited by the clearness and energy with which our friends set before us what is good and pure. The church is adapted to our free moral nature. It acts on us as rational and responsible beings, and serves us through our own efficiency. From these views we learn that the glory of the church does not lie in any particular government or form, but in the wisdom with which it combines such influences as are fitted to awaken and purify the soul. Am I asked to state more particularly what these influences are to which the church owes its efficacy? I

reply, that they are such as may be found in all churches, in all denominations. The first is, the character of the minister. This has an obvious, immediate, and powerful bearing on the great spiritual purpose of the church. I say his character, not his ordination. Ordination has no end but to introduce into the sacred office men qualified for its duties, and to give an impression of its importance. It is by his personal endowments, by his intellectual, moral, and religious worth, by his faithfulness and zeal, and not through any mysterious ceremony or power, that the minister enlightens and edifies the church. What matters it how he is ordained or set apart, if he give himself to his work in the fear of God? What matters it who has laid his hands on him, or whether he stand up in surplice or drab coat? I go to church to be benefited, not by hands or coats, but by the action of an enlightened and holy teacher on my mind and heart; not an overpowering, irresistible action, but such as becomes effectual through my own free thought and will. I go to be convinced of what is true, and to be warmed with love of what is good; and he who thus helps me is a true minister, no matter from what school, consistory, or ecclesiastical body he comes. He carries his commission in his soul. Do not say that his ministry has no "validity," because Rome, or Geneva, or Lambeth, or Andover, or Princeton, has not laid hands on him. What! Has he not opened my eyes to see, and roused my conscience to reprove? As I have heard him, has not my heart burned within me, and have I not, silently, given myself to God with new humility and love? Have I not been pierced by his warnings, and softened by his looks and tones of love? Has he not taught and helped me to deny myself, to conquer the world, to do good to a foe? Has he done this, and yet has his ministry

no " validity " ? What other validity can there be than this ? If a generous friend give me water to drink when I am parched with thirst, and I drink and am refreshed, will it do to tell me that, because he did not buy the cup at a certain licensed shop, or draw the water at a certain antiquated cistern, therefore his act of kindness is " invalid," and I am as thirsty and weak as I was before ? What more can a minister, with mitre or tiara, do, than help me, by wise and touching manifestations of God's truth, to become a holier, nobler man. If my soul be made alive, no matter who ministers to me ; and if not, the ordinances of the church, whether high or low, orthodox or heretical, are of no validity so far as I am concerned. The diseased man, who is restored to health, cares little whether his physician wear wig or cowl, or receive his diploma from Paris or London ; and so, to the regenerate man, it is of little moment where or by what processes he became a temple of the holy spirit.

According to these views, a minister deriving power from his intellectual, moral, and religious worth, is one of the chief elements of a true and quickening church. Such a man will gather a true church round him ; and we here learn that a Christian community is bound to do what may aid, and to abstain from what may impair, the virtue, nobleness, and spiritual energy of its minister. It should especially leave him free, should wish him to wear no restraints but those of a sense of duty. His office is to utter God's truth according to his apprehension of it, and he should be encouraged to utter it honestly, simply. He must follow his own conscience, and no other. How can he rebuke prevalent error with an unawed spirit ? Better that he should hold his peace than not speak from his own soul. Better that the pulpit be prostrated than its freedom be taken away.



The doctrine of “instructions” in politics is of very doubtful expediency ; but that instructions should issue from the congregation to the minister, we all, with one voice, pronounce wrong. The religious teacher, compelled to stifle his convictions, grows useless to his people, is shorn of his strength, loses self-respect, shrinks before his own conscience, and owes it to himself to refrain from teaching. If he be honest, upright, and pure, worthy of trust, worthy of being a minister, he has a right to freedom ; and when he uses it conscientiously, though he may err in judgment, and may give pain to judicious hearers, he has still a right to respect. There are, indeed, few religious societies which would knowingly make the minister a slave. Many err on the side of submission, and receive his doctrines with a blind, unquestioning faith. Still, the members of a congregation, conscious of holding the support of their teacher in their hands, are apt to expect a cautious tenderness towards their known prejudices or judgments, which, though not regarded as servility, is very hostile to that firm, bold utterance of truth, on which the success of his ministry chiefly depends.

I have mentioned the first condition of the most useful church ; it is the high character of its minister. The second is to be found in the spiritual character of its members. This, like the former, is, from the very principles of human nature, fitted to purify and save. It was the intention of Christ that a quickening power should be exerted in a church, not by the minister alone, but also by the members on one another. Accordingly, we read of the “working of every part, every joint,” in his spiritual body. We come together in our places of worship, that heart may act on heart ; that, in the midst of that devout, a more fervent flame of piety may be kindled in our own breasts ; that we may hear God’s

word more eagerly, by knowing that it is drunk in by thirsty spirits around us ; that our own purpose of obedience may be confirmed by the consciousness that a holy energy of will is unfolding itself in our neighbours. To this sympathy the church is dedicated, and in this its highest influence is sometimes found. To myself the most effectual church is that in which I see the signs of Christian affection in those around me, in which warm hearts are beating on every side, in which a deep stillness speaks of the absorbed soul, in which I recognize fellow-beings, who in common life have impressed me with their piety. One look from a beaming countenance, one tone in singing from a deeply moved heart, perhaps aids me more than the sermon. When nothing is said, I feel it good to be among the devout ; and I wonder not that the Quakers, in some of their still meetings, profess to hold the most intimate union, not only with God, but with each other. It is not with the voice only that man communicates with man. Nothing is so eloquent as the deep silence of a crowd. A sigh, a low breathing, sometimes pours into us our neighbour's soul more than a volume of words. There is a communication more subtle than free-masonry between those who feel alike. How contagious is holy feeling ! On the other hand, how freezing, how palsying, is the gathering of a multitude, who feel nothing, who come to God's house without reverence, without love, who gaze around on each other as if they were assembled at a show, whose restlessness keeps up a slightly disturbing sound, whose countenances reveal no collectedness, no earnestness, but a frivolous or absent mind ! The very sanctity of the place makes this indifference more chilling. One of the coldest spots on earth is a church without devotion. What is it to me, that a costly temple is set apart, by ever so many rites, for God's service,

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that priests who trace their lineage to Apostles have consecrated it, if I find it thronged by the worldly and undevout. This is no church to me. I go to meet, not human bodies, but souls; and if I find them in an upper room, like that where the first disciples met, or in a shed, or in a street, there I find a church. There is the true altar, the sweet incense, the accepted priest. These all I find in sanctified souls.

True Christians give a sanctifying power, a glory, to the place of worship where they come together. In them Christ is present and manifested in a far higher sense than if he were revealed to the bodily eye. We are apt, indeed, to think differently. Were there a place of worship in which a glory, like that which clothed Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, were to shine forth, how should we throng to it as the chosen spot on earth! How should we honor this as eminently his church! But there is a more glorious presence of Christ than this. It is Christ formed in the souls of his disciples. Christ's bodily presence does not make a church. He was thus present in the thronged streets of Jerusalem, present in the synagogues and temples; but these were not churches. It is the presence of his spirit, truth, likeness, divine love, in the souls of men which attracts and unites them into one living body. Suppose that we meet together in a place consecrated by all manner of forms, but that nothing of Christ's spirit dwells in us. With all its forms, it is a synagogue of Satan, not a church of Jesus. Christ in the hearts of men, I repeat it, is the only church bond. The Catholics, to give them a feeling of the present Saviour, adorn their temples with paintings, representing him in the most affecting scenes of his life and death; and had worship never been directed to these, I should not object to them. But there is a far higher likeness to Christ than the artist ever



drew or chiselled. It exists in the heart of his true disciple. The true disciple surpasses Raphael and Michael Angelo. The latter have given us Christ's countenance from fancy, and at best having little likeness to the mild beauty and majestic form which moved through Judea. But the disciple who sincerely conforms himself to the disinterestedness, and purity, and filial worship, and all-sacrificing love of Christ, gives us no fancied representation, but the divine lineaments of his soul, the very spirit which beamed in his face, which spoke in his voice, which attested his glory as the Son of God. The truest church is that which has, in the highest degree, this spiritual presence of our Lord, this revelation of Jesus in his followers. This is the church in which we shall find the greatest aid to our virtue which outward institution can afford us.

I have thus spoken of the two chief elements of a living and effectual church ; a pure, noble-minded minister, and faithful followers of Christ. In the preceding remarks, I have had chiefly in view particular churches, organized according to some particular forms ; and I have maintained, that these are important only as ministering to Christian holiness or virtue. There is, however, a grander Church, to which I now ask your attention ; and the consideration of this will peculiarly confirm the lesson on which I am insisting, namely, that there is but one essential thing, true holiness, or disinterested love to God and man. There is a grander Church than all particular ones, however extensive ; the Church Catholic or Universal, spread over all lands, and one with the Church in heaven. That all Christ's followers form one body, one fold, is taught in various passages in the New Testament. You remember the earnestness of his last prayer " that they might all be one, as he and his Father are one."



Into this Church, all who partake the spirit of Christ are admitted. It asks not, Who has baptized us? Whose passport we carry? What badge we wear? If "baptized by the Holy Ghost," its wide gates are open to us. Within this Church are joined those whom different names have severed or still sever. We hear nothing of Greek, Roman, English Churches, but of Christ's Church only. My friends, this is not an imaginary union. The Scriptures, in speaking of it, do not talk rhetorically, but utter the soberest truth. All sincere partakers of Christian virtue are essentially one. In the spirit which pervades them dwells a uniting power found in no other tie. Though separated by oceans, they have sympathies strong and indissoluble. Accordingly, the clear strong utterance of one gifted, inspired Christian flies through the earth. It touches kindred chords in another hemisphere. The word of such a man as Fénelon, for instance, finds its way into the souls of scattered millions. Are not he and they of one church? I thrill with joy at the name of holy men who lived ages ago. Ages do not divide us. I venerate them more for their antiquity. Are we not one body? Is not this union something real! It is not men's coming together into one building which makes a church. Suppose that, in a place of worship, I sit so near a fellow-creature as to touch him; but that there is no common feeling between us, that the truth which moves me he inwardly smiles at as a dream of fancy; that the disinterestedness which I honor, he calls weakness or wild enthusiasm. How far apart are we, though visibly so near! We belong to different worlds. How much nearer am I to some pure, generous spirit in another continent, whose word has penetrated my heart, whose virtues have kindled me to emulation, whose pure thoughts are passing through my mind whilst I sit in the house of prayer? With which of these two have I church union?

Do not tell me that I surrender myself to a fiction of imagination, when I say that distant Christians, that all Christians and myself, form one body, one Church, just as far as a common love and piety possess our hearts. Nothing is more real than this spiritual union. There *is* one grand, all-comprehending Church ; and if I am a Christian I belong to it, and no man can shut me out of it. You may exclude me from your Roman Church, your Episcopal Church, and your Calvinistic Church, on account of supposed defects in my creed or my sect, and I am content to be excluded. But I will not be severed from the great body of Christ. Who shall sunder me from such men as Fénelon, and Pascal, and Borromeo, from Archbishop Leighton, Jeremy Taylor, and John Howard ? Who can rupture the spiritual bond between these men and myself ? Do I not hold them dear ? Does not their spirit, flowing out through their writings and lives, penetrate my soul ? Are they not a portion of my being ? Am I not a different man from what I should have been, had not these and other like spirits acted on mine ? And is it in the power of synod or conclave, or of all the ecclesiastical combinations on earth, to part me from them ? I am bound to them by thought and affection ; and can these be suppressed by the bull of a pope, or the excommunication of a council ? The soul breaks scornfully these barriers, these webs of spiders, and joins itself to the great and good ; and if it possess their spirit, will the great and good, living or dead, cast it off, because it is not enrolled in this or another sect ? A pure mind is free of the universe. It belongs to the Church, the family of the pure in all worlds. Virtue is no local thing. It is not honorable, because born in this community or that, but for its own independent, everlasting beauty. This is the bond of the Universal Church. No man can be

excommunicated from it but by himself, by the death of goodness in his own breast. All sentences of exclusion are vain, if he do not dissolve the tie of purity which binds him to all holy souls.

I honor the Roman Catholic Church on one account ; it clings to the idea of a Universal Church, though it has mutilated and degraded it. The word Catholic means Universal. Would to God, that the Church which has usurped the name had understood the reality ! Still Romanism has done something to give to its members the idea of their connection with that vast spiritual community or Church which has existed in all times and spread over all lands. It guards the memory of great and holy men who in all ages have toiled and suffered for religion, asserts the honors of the heroes of the faith, enshrines them in heaven as beatified saints, converts their legends into popular literature, appoints days for the celebration of their virtues, and reveals them almost as living to the eye by the pictures in which genius has immortalized their deeds. In doing this Rome has fallen indeed into error. She has fabricated exploits for these spiritual persons, and exalted them into objects of worship. But she has also done good. She has given to her members the feeling of intimate relation to the holiest and noblest men in all preceding ages. An interesting and often a sanctifying tie connects the present Roman Catholic with martyrs, and confessors, and a host of men whose eminent piety and genius and learning have won for them an immortality of fame. It is no mean service, thus to enlarge men's ideas and affections, to awaken their veneration for departed greatness, to teach them their connection with the grandest spirits of all times. It was this feature of Catholicism which most interested me in visiting Catholic countries. The services at the altar did not move,



but rather pained me. But when I cast my eyes on the pictures on the walls, which placed before me the holy men of departed ages, now absorbed in devotion and lost in rapture, now enduring with meek courage and celestial hope the agonies of a painful death in defence of the truth, I was touched, and I hope made better. The voice of the officiating priest I did not hear; but these sainted dead spoke to my heart, and I was sometimes led to feel as if an hour on Sunday spent in this communion were as useful to me, as if it had been spent in a Protestant church. These saints never rose to my thoughts as Roman Catholics. I never connected them with any particular church. They were to me living, venerable witnesses to Christ, to the power of religion, to the grandeur of the human soul. I saw what men might suffer for the truth, how they could rise above themselves, how real might become the ideas of God and a higher life. This inward reverence for the departed good helped me to feel myself a member of the Church Universal. I wanted no pope or priest to establish my unity with them. My own heart was witness enough to a spiritual fellowship. Is it not to be desired, that all our churches should have services to teach us our union with Christ's whole body? Would not this break our sectarian chains, and awaken reverence for Christ's spirit, for true goodness under every name and form? It is not enough to feel that we are members of this or that narrow communion. Christianity is universal sympathy and love. I do not recommend that our churches should be lined with pictures of saints. This usage must come in, if it come at all, not by recommendation, but by gradual change of tastes and feelings. But why may not the pulpit be used occasionally to give us the lives and virtues of eminent disciples in former ages? It is customary to



deliver sermons on the history of Peter, John, Paul, and of Abraham and Elijah and other worthies of the Old Testament; and this we do because their names are written in the Bible. But goodness owes nothing to the circumstance of its being recorded in a sacred book, nor loses its claim to grateful, reverent commemoration, because not blazoned there. Moral greatness did not die out with the Apostles. Their lives were reported for this among other ends, that their virtues might be propagated to future times, and that men might spring up as worthy a place among the canonized as themselves. What I wish is, that we should learn to regard ourselves as members of a vast spiritual community, as joint heirs and fellow-worshippers with the goodly company of Christian heroes who have gone before us, instead of immuring ourselves in particular churches. Our nature delights in this consciousness of vast connection. This tendency manifests itself in the patriotic sentiment, and in the passionate clinging of men to a great religious denomination. Its true and noblest gratification is found in the deep feeling of a vital, everlasting connection with the Universal Church, with the innumerable multitude of the holy on earth and in heaven. This Church we shall never make a substitute for virtue.

I have spoken of the Roman Catholic Church. My great objection to this communion is, that it has fallen peculiarly into the error which I am laboring to expose in this discourse, that it has attached idolatrous importance to the institution of the Church, that it virtually exalts this above Christ's spirit, above inward sanctity. Its other errors are of inferior importance. It does not offend me, that the Romanist maintains that a piece of bread, a wafer, over which a priest has pronounced some magical words, is the flesh and blood of Jesus

Christ I learn, indeed, in this error a humbling lesson of human credulity, of the weakness of human reason ; but I see nothing in it which strikes at the essential principles of religion. When the Roman Catholic tells me that God looks with abhorrence on all who will not see in the consecrated wafer Christ's flesh and blood, and when he makes the reception of this, from the hands of a consecrated priest, the door into Christ's fold, then I am shocked by the dishonor he casts on God and virtue, by his debasing conceptions of our moral nature and of the Divine, and by his cruel disruption of the ties of human and Christian brotherhood. How sad and strange that a man, educated under Christianity, should place religion in a church-connection, in church-rites, should shut from God's family the wisest and the best, because they conscientiously abstain from certain outward ordinances. Is not holiness of heart and life dear to God for its own sake, dear to him without the manipulations of a priest, without the agency of a consecrated wafer? The grand error of Roman Catholicism is its narrow church-spirit, its blind sectarianism, its exclusion of virtuous, pious men from God's favor, because they cannot eat, drink, or pray according to certain prescribed rites. Romanism has to learn, that nothing but the inward life is great and good in the sight of the Omniscient, and that all who cherish this are members of Christ's body. Romanism is any thing but what it boasts to be, the Universal Church. I am too much a Catholic to enlist under its banner.

I belong to the Universal Church ; nothing shall separate me from it. In saying this, however, I am no enemy to particular churches. In the present age of the world it is perhaps best, that those who agree in theological opinions should worship together ; and I do not object to the union of

several such churches in one denomination, provided that *all* sectarian and narrow feeling be conscientiously and scrupulously resisted. I look on the various churches of Christendom with no feelings of enmity. I have expressed my abhorrence of the sectarian spirit of Rome ; but in that, as in all other churches, individuals are better than their creed ; and amidst gross error and the inculcation of a narrow spirit noble virtues spring up, and eminent Christians are formed. It is one sign of the tendency of human nature to goodness, that it grows good under a thousand bad influences. The Romish Church is illustrated by great names. Her gloomy convents have often been brightened by fervent love to God and man. Her St. Louis, and Fénelon, and Massillon, and Cheverus ; her missionaries who have carried Christianity to the ends of the earth ; her sisters of charity who have carried relief and solace to the most hopeless want and pain : do not these teach us, that in the Romish Church the Spirit of God has found a home ? How much, too, have other churches to boast ! In the English Church, we meet the names of Latimer, Hooker, Barrow, Leighton, Berkeley, and Heber ; in the dissenting Calvinistic Church, Baxter, Howe, Watts, Doddridge, and Robert Hall ; among the Quakers, George Fox, William Penn, Robert Barclay, and our own Anthony Benezet, and John Woolman ; in the anti-Trinitarian Church, John Milton, John Locke, Samuel Price, and Priestley. To repeat these names does the heart good. They breathe a fragrance through the common air. They lift up the whole race to which they belonged. With the churches of which they were pillars or chief ornaments, I have many sympathies ; nor do I condemn the union of ourselves to these or any other churches whose doctrines we approve, provided that we do it without severing ourselves in the least from the



Universal Church. On this point, we cannot be too earnest. We must shun the spirit of sectarianism as from hell. We must shudder at the thought of shutting up God in any denomination. We must think no man the better for belonging to our communion ; no man the worse for belonging to another. We must look with undiminished joy on goodness, though it shine forth from the most adverse sect. Christ's spirit must be equally dear and honored, no matter where manifested. To confine God's love or his good spirit to any party, sect, or name, is to sin against the fundamental law of the kingdom of God ; to break that living bond with Christ's Universal Church, which is one of our chief helps to perfection.

I have now given what seem to me the most important views in relation to the Church ; and in doing this I have not quoted much from Scripture, because quotations cannot be given fully on this or on any controverted point in the compass of a discourse. I have relied on what is vastly more important, on the general strain and tone of Scripture, on the spirit of the Christian religion, on the sum and substance of Christ's teachings, which is plainly this, that inward holiness, or goodness, or disinterested love, is all in all. I also want time to consider at large the arguments or modes of reasoning by which this or that church sets itself forth as the only true church, and by which the necessity of entering it is thought to be proved. I cannot, however, abstain from offering a few remarks on these.

The principal arguments on which exclusive churches rest their claims are drawn from Christian history and literature, in other words, from the records of the primitive ages of our faith, and from the writings of the early Fathers. These arguments, I think, may be disposed of by a single remark, that they cannot be comprehended or weighed by the mass of



Christians. How very, very few in our congregations can enter into the critical study of ecclesiastical history, or wade through the folios of the Greek and Latin fathers! Now, if it were necessary to join a particular church in order to receive the blessings of Christianity, is it to be conceived that the discovery of this church should require a learning plainly denied to the mass of human beings? Would not this church shine out with the brightness of the sun? Would it be hidden in the imperfect records of distant ages, or in the voluminous writings of a body of ancient authors, more remarkable for rhetoric than soundness of judgment. The learned cannot agree about these authorities. How can the great multitudes of believers interpret them? Would not the Scriptures guide us by simple, sure, rules, to the only true Church, if to miss it were death? To my own mind, this argument has a force akin to demonstration.

I pass to another method of defending the claims which one or another church sets up to exclusive acceptance with God. It is an unwarrantable straining of the figurative language of Scripture. Because the Church is spoken of as one body, vine, or temple, theologians have argued that it is one outward organization, to which all men must be joined. But a doctrine built on metaphor is worth little. Every kind of absurdity may find a sanction in figures of speech, explained by tame, prosaic, cold-hearted commentators. The beautiful forms of speech to which I have referred were intended to express the peculiarly close and tender unions which necessarily subsist among all the enlightened and sincere disciples of such a religion as Christ's, a religion, whose soul, essence, and breath of life is Love, which reveals to us in Jesus the perfection of philanthropy, and which calls to us to drink spiritually of that blood of self-sacrifice which was shed

for the whole human race. How infinitely exalted is the union of minds and hearts formed by such a religion, above any outward connection established by rites and forms. Yet the latter has been seized on by the earthly understanding as the chief meaning of Scripture, and magnified into supreme importance. Has not Paul taught us that there is but one perfect bond, Love ? \* Has not Christ taught us, that the seal set on his disciples, by which all men are to know them, is Love ? Is not this the badge of the true Church, the life of the true body of Christ ? And is not every disciple of every name and form who is inspired with this, embraced indissolubly in the Christian union ?

It is sometimes urged by those who maintain the necessity of connection with what they call "the true Church," that God has a right to dispense his blessings through what channels or on what terms he pleases ; that if he sees fit to communicate his Holy Spirit through a certain priesthood or certain ordinances, we are bound to seek the gift in his appointed way ; and that, having actually chosen this method of imparting it, he may justly withhold it from those who refuse to comply with his appointment. I reply, that the right of the Infinite Father to bestow his blessings in such ways as to his infinite wisdom and love may seem best, no man can be so irreverent as to deny. But is it not reasonable to expect, that he will adopt such methods or conditions as will seem to accord with his perfection ? And ought we not to distrust such as seem to dishonor him ? Suppose, for example, that I were told that the Infinite Father had decreed to give his Holy Spirit to such as should bathe freely in the sea. Ought I not to require the most plain, undeniable proofs of a pur-

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\* Colossians iii. 14.

pose apparently so unworthy of his majesty and goodness, before yielding obedience to it? The presumption against it is exceedingly strong. That the Infinite Father, who is ever present to the human soul, to whom it is unspeakably dear, who has created it for communion with himself, who desires and delights to impart to it his grace, — that he should ordain sea-bathing as a condition or means of spiritual communication is so improbable, that I must insist on the strongest testimony to its truth. Now I meet precisely this difficulty in the doctrine, that God bestows his Holy Spirit on those who receive bread and wine, or flesh and blood, or a form of benediction or baptism, or any other outward ministration, from the hands or lips of certain privileged ministers or priests. It is the most glorious act and manifestation of God's power and love, to impart enlightening, quickening, purifying influences to the immortal soul. To imagine that these descend in connection with certain words, signs, or outward rites, administered by a frail fellow-creature, and are withheld or abridged in the absence of such rites, seems, at first, an insult to his wisdom and goodness; seems to bring down his pure, infinite throne, to set arbitrary limits to his highest agency, and to assimilate his worship to that of false gods. The Scriptures teach us, "that God giveth grace to the humble"; that "he giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." This is the great law of Divine communications; and we can see its wisdom, because the mind which hungers for Divine assistances is most prepared to use them aright. And can we really believe, that the prayers and aspirations of a penitent, thirsting soul need to be seconded by the outward offices of a minister or priest? Or that for want of these, they find less easy entrance into the ear of the ever-present, all-loving Father? My mind recoils from this doctrine as dishonorable



to God, and I ought not to receive it without clear proofs. I want something more than metaphors, or analogies, or logical inferences. I want some express Divine testimony. And where is it given? Do we not know, that thousands and millions of Christians, whose lives and death have borne witness to their faith, have been unable to find it in the Scriptures, or anywhere else? And can we believe that the spiritual communication of such men with the Divinity has been forfeited or impaired, because they have abstained from rites which, in their consciences, they could not recognize as of Divine appointment? That so irrational and extravagant a doctrine should enter the mind of a man who has the capacity of reading the New Testament, would seem an impossibility, did not history show us that it has been, not only believed, but made the foundation of the bitterest intolerance and the bloodiest persecutions.

The notion that, by a decree of God's sovereign will, his grace or spirit flows, through certain rites, to those who are in union with a certain church, and that it is promised to none besides, has no foundation in Scripture or reason. The Church, as I have previously suggested, is not an arbitrary appointment; it does not rest on will, but is ordained on account of its obvious fitness to accomplish the spiritual improvement which is the end of Christianity. It corresponds to our nature. It is a union of means, and influences, and offices, which rational and moral creatures need. It has no affinity with the magical operations so common in false religions; its agency is intelligible, and level to the common mind. Its two great rites, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are not meant to act as charms. When freed from the errors and superstitions which have clung to them for ages, and when administered as they should be, with tenderness and solem-



nity, they are powerful means of bringing great truths to the mind, and of touching the heart, and for these ends they are ordained. The adaptation of the Church to the promotion of holiness among men, is its grand excellence ; and where it accomplishes this end, its work is done, and no greater can be conceived on earth or in heaven. The moment we shut our eyes on this truth, and conceive of the Church as serving us by forms and ordinances, which are effectual only in the hands of privileged officials or priests, we plunge into the region of shadows and superstitions. We have no ground to tread on, no light to guide us. This mysterious power, lodged in the hands of a few fellow-creatures, tends to give a servile spirit to the mass of Christians, to impair manliness and self-respect, to subdue the intellect to the reception of the absurdest dogmas. Religion loses its simple grandeur, and degenerates into mechanism and form. The conscience is quieted by something short of true repentance ; something besides purity of heart and life is made the qualification for heaven. The surest device for making the mind a coward and a slave is a wide-spread and closely cemented church, the powers of which are concentrated in the hands of a "sacred order," and which has succeeded in arrogating to its rites or ministers a sway over the future world, over the soul's everlasting weal or woe. The inevitable, degrading influence of such a church is demonstrative proof against its Divine origin.

There is no end to the volumes written in defence of this or that church, which sets itself forth as the only true church, and claims exclusive acceptance with God. But the unlettered Christian has an answer to them all. He cannot and need not seek it in libraries. He finds it, almost without seeking, in plain passages of the New Testament,

and in his own heart. He reads and he feels that religion is an inward life. This he knows, not by report, but by consciousness, by the prostration of his soul in penitence, by the surrender of his will to the Divine, by overflowing gratitude, by calm trust, and by a new love to his fellow-creatures. Will it do to tell such a man that the promises of Christianity do not belong to him, that access to God is denied him, because he is not joined with this or that exclusive church? Has not this access been granted to him already? Has he not prayed in his griefs, and been consoled? in his temptations, and been strengthened? Has he not found God near in his solitudes, and in the great congregation? Does he thirst for any thing so fervently as for perfect assimilation to the Divine purity? And can he question God's readiness to help him, because he is unable to find in Scripture a command to bind himself to this or another self-magnifying Church? How easily does the experience of the true Christian brush away the cobwebs of theologians! He loves and reveres God, and in this spirit has a foretaste of heaven; and can heaven be barred against him by ecclesiastical censures? He has felt the power of the cross and resurrection and promises of Jesus Christ; and is there any "height or depth" of human exclusiveness and bigotry which can separate him from his Lord? He can die for truth and humanity; and is there any man so swelled by the conceit of his union with the true Church as to stand apart and say, "I am holier than thou?" When, by means of the writings or conversation of Christians of various denominations, you look into their hearts and discern the deep workings, and conflicts, and aspirations of piety, can you help seeing in them tokens of the presence and operations of God's spirit, more authentic and touching than

in all the harmonies and beneficent influences of the outward universe? Who can shut up this spirit in any place or any sect? Who will not rejoice to witness it in its fruits of justice, goodness, purity, and piety, wherever they meet the eye? Who will not hail it as the infallible sign of the accepted worshipper of God?

One word more respecting the arguments adduced in support of one or another exclusive church. They are continually and of necessity losing their force. Arguments owe their influence very much to the mental condition of those to whom they are addressed. What is proof to one man is no proof to another. The evidence which is triumphant in one age is sometimes thought below notice in the next. Men's reasonings on practical subjects are not cold, logical processes, standing separate in the mind, but are carried on in intimate connection with their prevalent feelings and modes of thought. Generally speaking, that and that only is truth to man which accords with the common tone of his mind, with the mass of his impressions, with the results of his experience, with his measure of intellectual development, and especially with those deep convictions and biases which constitute what we call character. Now, it is the tendency of increasing civilization, refinement, and expansion of mind, to produce a tone of thought and feeling unfriendly to the church-spirit, to reliance on church-forms as essential to salvation. As the world advances, it leaves matters of form behind. In proportion as men get into the heart of things, they are less anxious about exteriors. In proportion as religion becomes a clear reality, we grow tired of shows. In the progress of ages there spring up in greater numbers men of mature thought and spiritual freedom, who unite self-reverence with reverence of God, and who cannot, without a



feeling approaching shame and conscious degradation, submit to a church which accumulates outward, rigid, mechanical observances towards the Infinite Father. A voice within them, which they cannot silence, protests against the perpetual repetition of the same signs, motions, words, as unworthy of their own spiritual powers, and of Him who deserves the highest homage of the reason and the heart. Their filial spirit protests against it. In common life, a refined, lofty mind expresses itself in simple, natural, unconstrained manners; and the same tendency, though often obstructed, is manifested in religion. The progress of Christianity, which must go on, is but another name for the growing knowledge and experience of that "spiritual worship of the Father," which Christ proclaimed as the end of his mission; and before this, the old, idolatrous reliance on ecclesiastical forms and organizations cannot stand. There is thus a perpetually swelling current which exclusive churches have to stem, and which must sooner or later sweep away their proud pretensions. What avails it that this or another church summons to its aid fathers, traditions, venerated usages? The spirit, the genius of Christianity, is stronger than all these. The great ideas of the religion must prevail over narrow, perverse interpretations of it. On this ground, I have no alarm at reports of the triumphs of the Catholic Church. The spirit of Christianity is stronger than popes and councils. Its venerableness and divine beauty put to shame the dignities and pomps of a hierarchy; and men must more and more recognize it as alone essential to salvation.

From the whole discussion through which I have now led you, you will easily gather how I regard the Church, and what importance I attach to it. In its true idea, or regarded



as the union of those who partake in the spirit of Jesus Christ, I revere it as the noblest of all associations. Our common social unions are poor by its side. In the world we form ties of interest, pleasure, ambition. We come together as creatures of time and sense, for transient amusement or display. In the Church we meet as God's children; we recognize in ourselves something higher than this animal and worldly life. We come, that holy feeling may spread from heart to heart. The Church, in its true idea, is a retreat from the world. We meet in it, that by union with the holy we may get strength to withstand our common intercourse with the impure. We meet to adore God, to open our souls to his spirit, and by recognition of the common Father to forget all distinction among ourselves, to embrace all men as brothers. This spiritual union with the holy, who are departed and who yet live, is the beginning of that perfect fellowship which constitutes heaven. It is to survive all ties. The bonds of husband and wife, parent and child, are severed at death; the union of the virtuous friends of God and man is as eternal as virtue, and this union is the essence of the true Church.

To the church-relation, in this broad, spiritual view of it, I ascribe the highest dignity and importance. But as to union with a particular denomination or with a society of Christians for public worship and instruction, this, however important, is not to be regarded as the highest means of grace. We ought, indeed, to seek help for ourselves, and to give help to others, by upholding religious institutions, by "meeting together in the name of Christ." The influence of Christianity is perpetuated and extended, in no small degree by the public offices of piety, by the visible "communion of saints." But it is still true that the public means of relig-

ion are not its chief means. Private helps to piety are the most efficacious. The great work of religion is to be done, not in society, but in secret, in the retired soul, in the silent closet. Communion with God is eminently the means of religion, the nutriment and life of the soul, and we can commune with God in solitude as nowhere else. Here his presence may be most felt. It is by the breathing of the unrestrained soul, by the opening of the whole heart to "Him who seeth in secret"; it is by reviewing our own spiritual history, by searching deeply into ourselves, by solitary thought, and solitary, solemn consecration of ourselves to a new virtue; it is by these acts, and not by public gatherings, that we chiefly make progress in the religious life. It is common to speak of the house of public worship as a holy place; but it has no exclusive sanctity. The holiest spot on earth is that where the soul breathes its purest vows, and forms or executes its noblest purposes; and on this ground were I to seek the holiest spot in your city, I should not go to your splendid sanctuaries, but to closets of private prayer. Perhaps the "Holy of Holies" among you is some dark, narrow room, from which most of us would shrink as unfit for human habitation; but God dwells there. He hears there music more grateful than the swell of all your organs, sees there a beauty such as nature, in these her robes of spring, does not unfold; for there he meets, and sees, and hears, the humblest, most thankful, most trustful worshippers; sees the sorest trials serenely borne, the deepest injuries forgiven; sees toils and sacrifices cheerfully sustained, and death approached through poverty and lonely illness with a triumphant faith. The consecration which such virtues shed over the obscurest spot, is not and cannot be communicated by any of those outward rites by which our splendid structures are dedicated to God.

You see the rank which belongs to the Church, whether gathered in one place or spread over the whole earth. It is a sacred and blessed union, but must not be magnified above other means and helps of religion. The great aids of piety are secret, not public. The Christian cannot live without private prayer ; he may live and make progress without a particular church. Providence may place us far from the resorts of our fellow-disciples, beyond the sound of the Sabbath-bell, beyond all ordinances ; and we may find Sabbaths and ordinances in our own spirits. Illness may separate us from the outward Church, as well as from the living world, and the soul may yet be in health and prosper. There have been men of eminent piety, who, from conscience, have separated themselves from all denominations of Christians and all outward worship. Milton, that great soul, in the latter years of his life, forsook all temples made with hands, and worshipped wholly in the inward sanctuary. So did William Law, the author of that remarkable book, " The Serious Call to a Holy Life." His excess of devotion (for in him devotion ran into excess) led him to disparage all occasional acts of piety. He lived in solitude, that he might make life a perpetual prayer. These men are not named as models in this particular. They mistook the wants of the soul, and misinterpreted the Scriptures. Even they, with all their spirituality, would have found moral strength and holy impulse in religious association. But with such examples before us, we learn not to exclude men from God's favor, because severed from the outward Church.

The doctrine of this discourse is plain. Inward sanctity, pure love, disinterested attachment to God and man, obedience of heart and life, sincere excellence of character, this is the one thing needful, this the essential thing in religion ; and

all things else, ministers, churches, ordinances, places of worship, all are but means, helps, secondary influences, and utterly worthless when separated from this. To imagine that God regards any thing but this, that he looks at any thing but the heart, is to dishonor him, to express a mournful insensibility to his pure character. Goodness, purity, virtue, this is the only distinction in God's sight. This is intrinsically, essentially, everlastingly, and by its own nature, lovely, beautiful, glorious, divine. It owes nothing to time, to circumstance, to outward connections. It shines by its own light. It is the sun of the spiritual universe. It is God himself dwelling in the human soul. Can any man think lightly of it, because it has not grown up in a certain church, or exalt any church above it? My friends, one of the grandest truths of religion is the supreme importance of character, of virtue, of that divine spirit which shone out in Christ. The grand heresy is, to substitute any thing for this, whether creed, or form, or church. One of the greatest wrongs to Christ is to despise his character, his virtue, in a disciple who happens to wear a different name from our own.

When I represent to myself true virtue or goodness; not that which is made up of outward proprieties and prudent calculations, but that which chooses duty for its own sake, and as the first concern; which respects impartially the rights of every human being; which labors and suffers with patient resolution for truth and others' welfare; which blends energy and sweetness, deep humility and self-reverence; which places joyful faith in the perfection of God, communes with him intimately, and strives to subject to his pure will all thought, imagination, and desire; which lays hold on the promise of everlasting life, and in the strength of this hope endures calmly and firmly the sorest evils of the present



state ; when I set before me this virtue, all the distinctions on which men value themselves fade away. Wealth is poor ; worldly honor is mean ; outward forms are beggarly elements. Condition, country, church, all sink into unimportance. Before this simple greatness I bow, I revere. The robed priest, the gorgeous altar, the great assembly, the pealing organ, all the exteriors of religion, vanish from my sight, as I look at the good and great man, the holy, disinterested soul. Even I, with vision so dim, with heart so cold, can see and feel the divinity, the grandeur, of true goodness. How then must God regard it ! To his pure eye, how lovely must it be ! And can any of us turn from it, because some water has not been dropped on its forehead, or some bread put into its lips by a minister or priest ; or because it has not learned to repeat some mysterious creed, which a church or human council has ordained ?

My friends, reverence virtue, holiness, the upright will which inflexibly cleaves to duty and the pure law of God. Reverence nothing in comparison with it. Regard this as the end, and all outward services as the means. Judge of men by this. Think no man the better, no man the worse, for the church he belongs to. Try him by his fruits. Expel from your breasts the demon of sectarianism, narrowness, bigotry, intolerance. This is not, as we are apt to think, a slight sin. It is a denial of the supremacy of goodness. It sets up something, whether a form or dogma, above the virtue of the heart and the life. Sectarianism immures itself in its particular church as in a dungeon, and is there cut off from the free air, the cheerful light, the goodly prospects, the celestial beauty, of the Church Universal.

My friends, I know that I am addressing those who hold

various opinions as to the controverted points of theology. We have grown up under different influences. We bear different names. But if we purpose solemnly to do God's will, and are following the precepts and example of Christ, we are one Church, and let nothing divide us. Diversities of opinion may incline us to worship under different roofs, or diversities of tastes or habit, to worship with different forms. But these varieties are not schisms; they do not break the unity of Christ's Church. We may still honor and love, and rejoice in one another's spiritual life and progress, as truly as if we were cast into one and the same unyielding form. God loves variety in nature and in the human soul, nor does he reject it in Christian worship. In many great truths, in those which are most quickening, purifying, and consoling, we all, I hope, agree. There is, too, a common ground of practice, aloof from all controversy, on which we may all meet. We may all unite hearts and hands in doing good, in fulfilling God's purposes of love towards our race, in toiling and suffering for the cause of humanity, in spreading intelligence, freedom, and virtue, in making God known for the reverence, love, and imitation of his creatures, in resisting the abuses and corruptions of past ages, in exploring and drying up the sources of poverty, in rescuing the fallen from intemperance, in succoring the orphan and widow, in enlightening and elevating the depressed portions of the community, in breaking the yoke of the oppressed and enslaved, in exposing and withstanding the spirit and horrors of war, in sending God's word to the ends of the earth, in redeeming the world from sin and woe. The angels and pure spirits who visit our earth come, not to join a sect, but to do good to all. May this universal charity descend on us, and possess our

hearts ; may our narrowness, exclusiveness, and bigotry melt away under this mild celestial fire. Thus we shall not only join ourselves to Christ's Universal Church on earth, but to the Invisible Church, to the innumerable company of the just made perfect, in the mansions of everlasting purity and peace.

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A

BRIEF STATEMENT

OF

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

OF

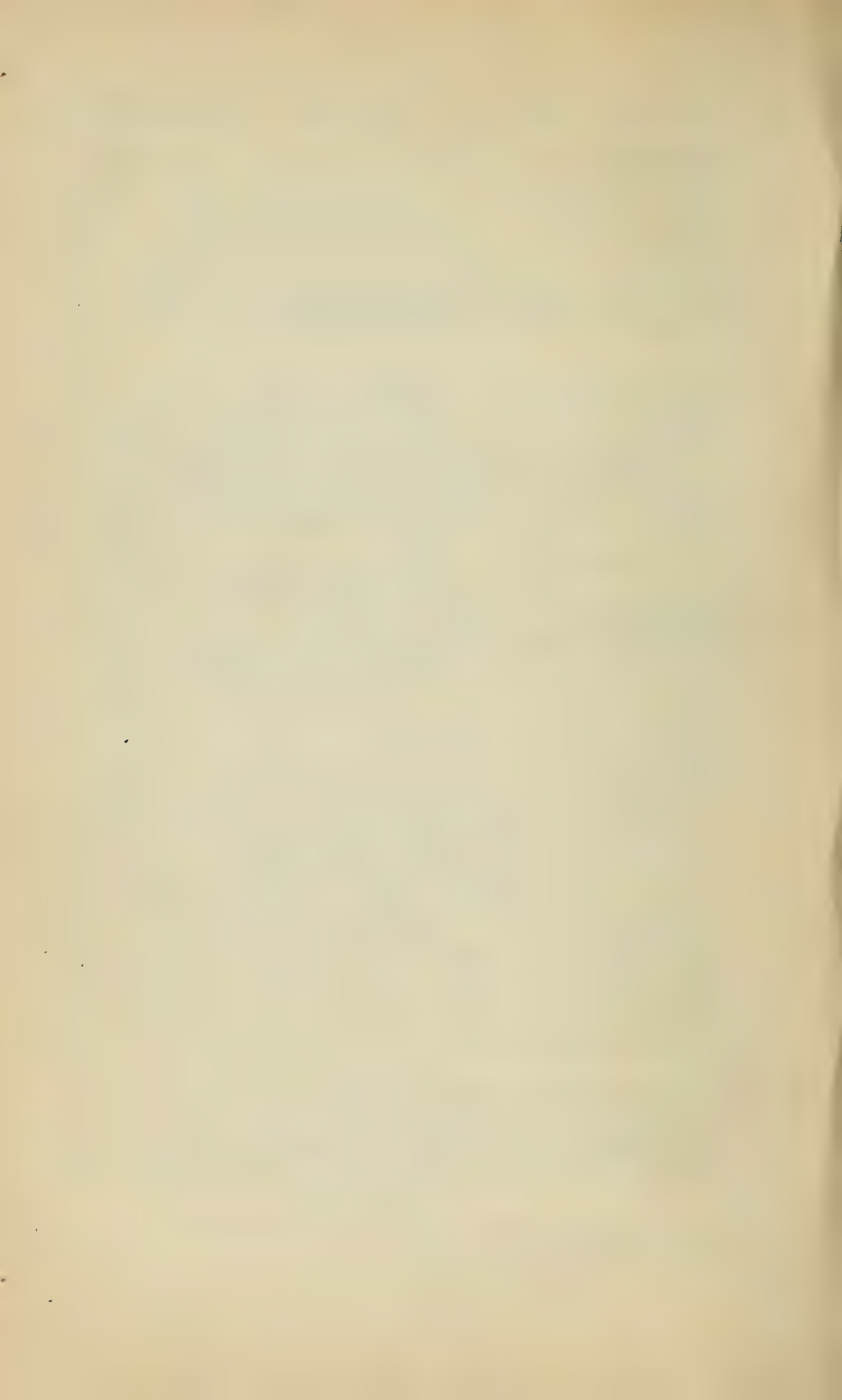
THE ATONEMENT

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BY W. H. FURNESS.

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BOSTON:  
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.



# A BRIEF STATEMENT

## OF THE

### CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE ATONEMENT.

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The Orthodox doctrine of the Atonement is cherished by the great body of our fellow Christians as the central truth of the Gospel. We who reject it are considered as rejecting Christianity itself, and as forfeiting all claim to be entitled Christians.

This doctrine, as is generally well known, teaches that man, being exposed by actual sin and a depraved nature to the eternal wrath of God, is saved from due punishment by the death of Christ, which is received by Heaven as a satisfaction for the sin of the world. The Divine wrath is appeased thereby. And now, so this doctrine declares, a way is opened by which, without any violation of justice, God may exercise his mercy, and forgive those who, sincerely penitent, place all their reliance on the merits of Christ, on the Atonement made by his blood.

We reject this representation, because it contradicts not only the simplest dictates of justice and mercy, but also the plain and pervading truths of Scripture.

Justice never requires, when the law has been violated,

merely that there should be suffering without reference to the individual upon whom it is inflicted. It is the very essence of justice, that it makes a radical and indestructible distinction between the innocent and the guilty, and the former can never *justly* relieve the latter from suffering, by suffering in their stead. "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." This is justice.

But there is as little of mercy as of justice in the mode of proceeding which this doctrine of the Atonement sets forth. God is revealed to us as the Almighty Father. All things, and the New Testament especially, teach us to seek our best apprehensions of God, and of the way in which he regards sinful man, through our knowledge and experience of the parental affection. It is at best but very little that we can know of the dread, unfathomable nature of the Almighty. All things teach us something of him. But it is in the parental heart that his spirit is most clearly revealed. Let us then bring the doctrine of the Atonement to this test. Let us follow the example of Christ, who, in declaring the divine love, appealed directly to parental affection. "If ye, being evil," said he, "know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" In like manner, we may ask, would an earthly parent make it impossible for an offending child to be forgiven unless some other and innocent being should consent to suffer the penalty he had incurred in his stead? The parental heart abhors the thought. If ye then, being evil, shrink from treating your children thus, how much more your Father who is in heaven.



We must look for an illustration of the manner in which God regards his guilty children, not to this doctrine of the Atonement, but to the immortal parable of the Prodigal Son. Here is Christ's representation of the whole matter. And how is the father here described as dealing with his sinning and repentant son? Does he refuse to receive him, until some unoffending one, his brother perhaps, has suffered in his place? Oh no! While he is yet a great way off, his father runs and falls on his neck and kisses him, and interrupts his confessions, and calls to the servants to bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and to put rings on his fingers and shoes on his feet. Heaven be praised for this touching exposition of the infinite mercy. It goes to the very heart of the matter. And we know that it is the true representation, and that the doctrine that contradicts it, no matter how widely received, or with what confidence asserted, is unchristian and false.

Were the Orthodox doctrine true, how differently would the parable of the Prodigal Son have read! — A certain man had two sons, and the younger son left his father's house, and went into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living, and was driven to feed swine for his bread, and to envy the swine the husks that they devoured. And when he came to himself he rose and returned to his father; and fell down at his feet, and with tears and groans confessed that he had sinned, and was unworthy to be called his son. And his father frowned, and hid his face from his son, and said unto him: Thou hast forsaken my house; thou hast transgressed my commandments. I know thee not. And the

father called to his servant, and said, "Drive away the wretch into the wilderness, and bar the gate, and let the wild beasts devour him." But the elder son drew nigh, with streaming eyes and bleeding heart, and cried; Upon me, O father, upon me pour out thy wrath. I will endure it all. Let my blood flow, and let my brother be forgiven. And the darkness passed away from the father's face, and he smiled and said, "Mine anger is allayed — my justice is satisfied. Thine atoning blood asserts my justice, and sets free my mercy."

But we reject this doctrine of the Atonement, not only on the plain grounds of reason and nature, but also because, as we read the Bible, it furnishes no sort of authority for it.

The word, *atonement*, as has been stated a thousand times, occurs only once in the whole New Testament. "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the *atonement*." (Rom. v. 11.) And here the word in the original, thus translated, (when shall we be relieved from the necessity of repeating this statement?) is the very same word which is everywhere else translated in the New Testament, reconciliation. There is no objection to the word, atonement, if we retain the sense in which it is used in old English writers. To atone, originally meant to *at-one*, i. e. to make *one*, to unite, to reconcile those who are at variance; and atonement is synonymous with reconciliation. Jesus came, without controversy, to reconcile God and man, but not God to man, but man to God. He did not come to work any change in the Divine mind, for that, being perfect, is unchangeable in love, and it was from

the bosom of Divine love that he came, and by the arm of the Divine love was he upheld. But he came to change man, to renew him in the whole spirit of his mind. Man, created in the heavenly image, the child of God, has wandered, and is every day wandering from his father's house. Notwithstanding the light of reason, the voice of conscience, the lessons of providence, he forsakes the way of peace, wastes the rich heritage he receives, and would fain fill himself with husks, and becomes ever more miserable, and Christ comes to seek and save the lost, to bring him back and unite him with his forsaken parent, to reconcile him to his Maker by breathing into him a new mind, that love of truth and purity which will make him spiritually one with God. Christ was not sent to exert a pacifying influence upon the Almighty, but to exercise a saving influence upon the human soul. Accordingly an apostle hath declared, that "God is in Christ (that is, through or by means of Christ,) reconciling the world to himself."

These remarks will suffice to enable us to see how the death of Christ possesses a reconciling or, if you please, an *atoning* influence, using these words as synonymous. But we must keep in mind the great purpose of Christ, to save men from moral evil, from guilty desires and wrong doing, to soften their hardened hearts and enlighten their understandings, to render them just and merciful to one another, and pure and humble before God. In a word, he came to exert a moral power, and change the heart of man.

And what means did he use to this end?

In the first place, we have his heavenly instructions, those

words of eternal wisdom. "Love your enemies." "Return good for evil." "Blessed are the pure in heart." "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." And these divine precepts were accompanied with the most cheering representation of the benignity of the All-powerful. Every reason is given us to believe that He is more ready to pardon, than we are to repent. We are taught, as in the parable to which I have referred, that if we repent, the Divine Mercy will receive us with kisses and gifts. The authority of his words has never been questioned. They have been recognized as divine; and just so far as any man's heart has been touched, and his conduct controlled by them, he has been *saved, reconciled* to God, and has partaken of the blessings of the Atonement. He may be still afar off, yet he is brought on his way nearer to goodness and to God by the *atoning* efficacy of the instructions of Christ.

But Jesus Christ has exerted an atoning power through his life also. There is a power to lift man up into union with God, in the character of Christ. In him lives the truth which purifies the heart, — in his sublime self-renunciation, in his sympathy with the suffering and the friendless, in his unstipulating devotion to the Eternal Will. He bore to be misrepresented and reviled. He exposed himself to malignity and violence. He went about doing good, knowing not in the morning where he should rest his head at night. He was endowed with transcendent gifts, and, he used them all, never for himself, but for others, never as if he were doing any thing wonderful, but with divine simplicity, and without the shadow of parade. Thus in him was set before the eyes of man, the ravishing vision of a soul in intimate union, perfectly *at-one* with God.



There the truth we are to love and live stands manifest in the flesh, in a shape of surpassing glory, at once intelligible to the understanding, elevating to the imagination, affecting to the heart. Here then is a reconciling force, an atoning power to bring man to God. If we appreciate the life of Jesus, his trials and his victories, can we remain unmoved?

Of the great ministry of Reconciliation, the death of Christ is, however, the crowning event. He was put to death by men whose corruption could not endure his purity, whose darkness could not bear his light. He had uttered things which tended to destroy the ignorance upon which their power rested, and he could not be silenced or bribed by their rage or their flattery, and so there was nothing for them but to destroy him as speedily as possible, and overwhelm his name with infamy. He was true to the convictions in which he heard the voice of the Eternal Father speaking within him. He would not desert the cause of God and man, poor, benighted, lost man, and therefore he suffered that cruel death. Thus he gave the strongest possible manifestation of Love. In no other way could he have expressed the spirit, by which he was inspired and man was to be moved, so impressively. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Had Jesus lived in easy circumstances, had he encountered no opposition, made no sacrifices, the heart would have wanted that revelation of the love of Christ and of God, which now pleads with us through that death. It was necessary that the Mediator should mediate by suffering, necessary, not on account of the wrath of God — God knows no wrath; not on account of his Jus-

tice, — his Justice is but another name for that Divine Attribute, which under a different aspect, in a different relation, is Mercy, but because the nature of things, the nature of man, make it necessary. We might ask that the Saviour of man should have been seated, while on earth, on a throne. But no earthly, no celestial throne even, though flaming with the light inaccessible, though nations were prostrate before it, could so penetrate the heart as that black and bitter cross, transfigured by the spirit of him who suffered thereon, into the most expressive symbol known on earth, of the power of Love. We are made to be moved by it, as by nothing else. It is omnipotent. It is God. God is love; and in the nature of things it is impossible that a mightier manifestation of Love could be given than is given by the cross of Jesus. No crown, though beaming from an angel's head, could represent the more than kingly power of which the crown of thorns is the emblem. No robes of imperial purple could denote the unearthly authority with which every drop of that innocent blood pleads with the heart. Alas for us, if, while we contemplate the cross of Christ, it puts forth no atoning power, if we do not see with new eyes the beauty of that spirit of humanity, that sympathy for the sinful, the despised, the friendless, which that cross so profoundly illustrates.

Thus have I sought to describe the nature of the Atonement which we have received through Jesus Christ. Remember, it was man, not God, who was to be reconciled, made *at-one* with Heaven. To this end a moral power, a power acting upon the heart, and renewing it, was needed. In the instructions of Jesus in his life, and especially

in his death, we have the needed power. In its power to move the soul, the atoning value of the cross is found. "If I be lifted up," said Jesus, that is, if I am put to death, "I will draw all men unto me." — Draw them by those mighty natural affections, which are created to be influenced by Love. This atoning power wrought mightily with the personal friends of Jesus. It changed them, reconciled them to Heaven; and it has been felt by multitudes, notwithstanding a thousand bewildering speculations.

Although this account of the true doctrine of Atonement may be very plain, still it cannot be denied, that the death of Christ is spoken of in a peculiar manner in the Epistles. I say in the Epistles, for out of them there is not the slightest appearance of foundation for the orthodox views of this great event. Christ himself has not breathed a word that gives us reason to suppose that he considered himself offered up to render God more placable, to satisfy Divine Justice. He declared indeed, that it was necessary for him to die, but not to reconcile the Father to his children, but to draw all men unto him. "For this end was I born," said he, upon a most solemn occasion, "and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth." And how does the truth act? Upon what does it act, but the human heart, purifying that. "Sanctify them," prayed Jesus, "through thy truth. Thy word is truth."

I have no idea that the Apostles have given any representation of the death of Jesus, different from his own. Their language, properly understood, conveys no meaning at variance with his declarations. Still, they speak of his

death in a peculiar manner. They continually represent it as a *sacrifice*. And is it strange that it should be so described? With the foregoing views of the nature of the Atonement, we use similar modes of speech. If an individual gives up his own life to save mine, I say that he *sacrifices* himself for me. So Jesus Christ was a *sacrifice* for the world, not to appease Divine Wrath. It was necessary, in the nature of things, that a spiritual influence should be exerted upon men for their salvation. This influence could be brought to bear upon them only by such an event as the death of Christ. He gave himself up, he *sacrificed* himself for mankind. Now if our language, cold and literal as it is, allows of such a mode of speaking, what should we not expect from Oriental minds, from hearts bursting with wonder and gratitude? The Apostles felt deeply, and they express themselves accordingly, in modes of speech which, however strong they seem to us, were in their view, no doubt, all too weak.

But further. The writers of the Epistles were Jews brought up from their infancy under a religion that dealt most abundantly in sacrifices, in the shedding of the blood of victims before the altar. "Almost all things," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, "are by the law," that is, under the Mosaic religion, "purged with blood, and without the shedding of blood is no remission." Under their Jewish faith, the Apostles had been taught that they were not cleansed from sin, until they had expressed their penitence by bringing a victim and shedding its blood at the altar. Blood was continually used in their religious ceremonies, and was intimately associated in the Jewish mind with sacred things. Now when we consider how men's ways



of speaking are affected by their habits of thought, is it not perfectly natural that the Apostles should have expressed themselves as they have done, and delighted in any analogies which they could trace between their old faith and their new? Familiar with victims, and sacrifices and blood, how naturally did they see in Jesus Christ a lamb without spot or blemish, whose blood was shed for the sins of the world.

In conclusion, there is one consideration to which attention has often been called, and which may be alluded to here. From the beginning of the world, in all times and countries, men have sought some substitute for personal virtue. They have been ready to give to God every thing but themselves, the fruits of the field, the firstlings of the flock, spoils taken in war, nay, their own children and their own lives, every thing and any thing but the living daily offering of the heart. This ancient and universal error, that God is to be pleased by any thing but personal holiness, has had a mighty influence in separating men from God. The tendency to substitute gifts and sacrifices and penances for inward purity, has divided man from his Maker, because it has kept men in their sins, in a state of moral alienation from God. Under this delusion they have flattered themselves that they might cherish what desires, indulge what passions they pleased, no matter how low and corrupting, if they only kept their account with God square by punctuality and strictness in giving gifts at the altar, by attendance upon church forms. In a word, it was this disposition to put forward artificial obligations, in the place of individual character, sanctified in the constant service of virtue, that

made a reconciliation, an atonement necessary ; and Jesus died to deliver men from this unhappy error. He sacrificed himself to do away the idea of sacrifices as substitutes for personal righteousness, to reveal the supreme worth of a spiritual sacrifice, the worship of the heart. It shows, therefore, how ingenious and cunning men are, in that they have discovered, in the very method taken to disabuse them of this error, the means of perpetuating it anew. In the death of Christ they have found a substitute, a sacrifice to be accepted instead of personal virtue, when, as I have said, Christ's death, properly understood, does away with the idea of any substitute whatever, removes this fatal fallacy, and opens the way of light and life by which man may return and be reconciled to God ; and so a full atonement be made.

Could we only stand at the foot of the cross and fathom its spiritual significance, and catching the light of that invisible glory which encircles it, we should begin to know the true atoning efficacy of the sufferings of Christ. His blood would not flow in vain. It would wash us from our sins by the heavenward thoughts, the fervent prayers for the gift of the same self-renouncing spirit, which it would inspire. Bear about in your hearts this emblem of all that is highest in the universe of God, and then when you are tempted by selfish desires to forsake the way of right, to disregard the Divine voice, to forsake God, the image of the spotless one dying in your behalf will rise before you, and that will save you, restore you to yourselves and to heaven, and reveal to you the unspeakable gift of the Atonement.

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“Though I bear record of myself, my record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go.”—JOHN viii. 14.

RESTING confidently in the belief that Jesus is a teacher come from God, we stand upon what may be called distinctively Christian ground. Not that we mean to deny the Christian name to those who reject the supernatural element in revelation; but it is evident that there is a broad distinction here which we are compelled to recognize. However excellent the Christian system may be, so long as it fails in the claim to divine authority, Christianity can be no more to us than the best among the “philosophies” of the world. If all stand upon the same level of authority, we select one or other of them, according to our best judgment. The sole authority, after all, would be in our own minds. But when we have once admitted that Jesus came from God; that he was inspired by the Divine Spirit, to reveal the truth and the will of God; that “he spake with authority,” and not as the philosophers and scribes,—we are removed from the school of speculation to that of discipleship. We become learners, to sit at the feet of Jesus,—we look to him for the words of eternal life. The whole realm of theological inquiry is still before us; but there is an authority of final appeal. When we know

what Jesus taught, whether in precept or doctrine, it becomes to us the rule of our lives, the law of our thoughts.

I am not able, in this respect, to see any half-way ground. However much we may dispute concerning the instructions of Christ, we cannot dispute, after we have once admitted his divine mission, as to our duty in receiving and obeying his words. Perhaps it is here, and not in disputed doctrines, that the radical difference is found, indicated by the modern use of the word Evangelical. Unless the word is used merely for sectarian exclusiveness, as the Shibboleth of a party, the evangelical Christian is one who accepts the Evangel, or gospel, of Jesus Christ, as the authority, the final appeal, in matters of faith and practice. They who refuse to do this must regard Jesus merely as a human teacher, and, although they may call him "The Christ," may be still looking for another. Their effort must be, not so much to know the mind of Jesus, as to know their own minds. The name of Christian may be freely accorded to them if they claim it; because their lives may bear Christian fruit, and their conscientious purpose may be to live according to the pure spirit of Christianity. They may be nearer to Jesus, in fact, than many who are stronger in their belief. They are oftentimes seekers after truth, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, having really been educated by Christian influences up to the Christian standard, although intellectually disputing the Divine Christian authority. "To his own master every one standeth or falleth: who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

But the distinction to which we refer is not the less real, and cannot be kept out of sight. Christian charity does not require, and allegiance to truth does not permit us, to neglect it. It is vital both in religion and theology. Are we disciples, or is Christ only first among equals? To



me, I confess, the question is one of infinite significance. Without deciding for others or judging them, it is to me a matter of infinite importance, to know whether I have a guide, a master, an authority, or not. I feel most deeply the comfort of those words which Jesus spoke to his disciples, before parting with them: "Peace I leave with you, my peace give I unto you; let not your heart be troubled, neither be ye afraid; as my Father spake unto me, even so have I spoken unto you." I would not, for the whole world, lose that confidence, that trust, that "repose which ever is the same." I would not, for the world, feel that all the great truths of religion depend, for their certainty to me, upon my own speculations. It is true that they are rational conclusions; and the more we study them, the more perfectly they seem in accordance with the natural laws of thought. The philosophical development of our own minds leads us continually back again to Christian truth. Natural religion, so called, culminates in the divine. But still I am thankful to God, that, on the portals of that resting-place of faith, it is written, "Thus saith the Lord." The perfect harmony between educated natural reason and the divine instructions of Jesus, should not deceive us. As, in moral philosophy, the highest goodness leads to the most perfect individual happiness, and the two ultimately coincide; and yet not happiness, but duty alone, must be recognized as the motive and law, or our seeking for happiness soon degenerates into self-seeking, which uses goodness as an instrument or means to a higher end, and sacrifices both means and end by the same mistake: so it is in the department of religious truth, that reason, guided by the divine authority, leads us to assured convictions concerning God and eternity, and we are betrayed into thinking that the conclusion belongs to our own natural thought, and that no submission to authority is longer

required. But let the authority be discarded, hold to the truth discovered as only a human deduction from human premises, and the established foundation begins to give way, the superstructure of faith begins to totter. We think, instead of believing; we hope, instead of trusting; and presently go out from that peaceful resting-place, as wanderers, to seek after God, if haply we may find him. By no such speculations concerning truth did the elders obtain their good report. By no such questionings and probable conclusions were the martyrs' noble host strengthened and glorified. By no such human philosophy, however transcendental, were the apostles inspired to exclaim, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the word of power, "through our Lord Jesus Christ." He spake that which he knew, and testified that which he had seen, and we receive his witness. Human hesitation and doubt may remain; the weakness of the flesh may make the spirit waver; but the anchor of Christian faith is sure and steadfast. We know in whom we have believed, and return to him, again and again, from all our inquiries, to hear the words of eternal life.

The question of divine authority being answered, the first and most natural inquiry, in the settlement of our religious faith, is that which concerns Jesus himself. We may, indeed, obey his commands and believe his doctrines, without knowing any thing more concerning him, than that he was an inspired teacher. But the confidence of our faith and the fervor of our devotion must depend a great deal upon our opinions concerning him who brings the instruction and the commands. Who was Jesus Christ? What place does he hold in the universe? What do we mean when we call him divine, and when we call him human? What was he, not only in his office, but in him-

self, in his own nature? How does he stand in his relation to God, and how in relation to man?

The form in which we have put these questions will at once show to any thoughtful person, that the answer cannot be sharply and exactly given. Our knowledge of spiritual life is so imperfect, our conception of spiritual existence is so dim, that we see through a glass darkly at the best, and not yet face to face. We do not yet know as we are known. Ask the same questions concerning yourself, your own existence, your exact place in the universe; your relation to God,—how it is that you are dependent upon him, and yet free; your relation to man,—how it is that we are all equal before God, and yet separated from each other, through imperceptible gradations, by a distance almost as great as that which separates the grovelling brute, living upon husks, from the angels that wait to do God's bidding nearest to his throne, so that the same human nature includes the lowest cannibal savage and the highest Christian philanthropist,—and you will feel the limitation of your ignorance and weakness concerning yourself, not less than when you are seeking to be wise above what is written concerning Jesus Christ. We are like children having learned the alphabet, who make experiment of their knowledge by reading the poetry of Milton and the speculations of Plato. He who inquires about the spirit's life and growth, whether of his own soul or of those who are above him or below him, will find himself in a world of mystery. Like the bird which rises for a time with strong and confident wing, but presently the thinness of the air, the weakness of his muscles, and the attraction of the earth, compel him to return, exhausted and weary, to a resting-place; so, in our researches for spiritual truth, we advance confidently, with the feeling of assured knowledge, positive both in denial and assertion,



sanguine in the hope of arriving at the ultimate truth but soon, in the ascending flight, feel ourselves checked, limited, restrained, drawn back again to reconsider the premises of thought, compelled to seek a resting-place in the alphabet of Christianity. We begin with confidence, and come back with humility. We begin thinking ourselves little lower than the angels, and come back to prostrate ourselves before God, and exclaim, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" We begin with the thought that we can comprehend God himself, and all the mysteries of his infinity, and come back with the conviction that we do not even know ourselves. It is the practical lesson of humility, but also of conscious exaltation. Our hearts empty themselves of pride and arrogance, to become full of adoration and faith. We claim to know less; in reality, we know infinitely more. We would as soon think of bounding infinite space, as to define, in exact words, either the nature of God or of man, who was created in the image of God. But our consciousness of spiritual life and personal immortality becomes continually deeper; and the God, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, finds his dwelling-place in the humble and contrite heart.

Therefore let those who begin their theological inquiries with compass and line, to fix the exact boundaries of Christ's nature, as they would survey a field before buying it,—let them first try the experiment upon themselves. When they can tell me of their own souls, where the human ends and the divine begins, I will tell them the same concerning him. They who cannot tell what to think of John the Baptist must be content to remain in partial ignorance concerning him whose shoes John the Baptist was not worthy to bear. Something we may know, and I think abundantly enough for all the practical uses of life



and for its consolations. "My grace is sufficient for thee," was the answer to St. Paul, when he prayed that some thorn in the flesh should be removed. In like manner, the knowledge which we have is sufficient for us, if we use it well; and the truth which is made known may become more vitalizing to our souls because of that which remains unrevealed.

The principal source of knowledge concerning Jesus Christ must evidently be his testimony of himself. It is possible that his disciples were mistaken in their estimate of him, as we know they were during a great part of their lives; but his record of himself must be received as true. Even those who only admit that he was an honest, truth-telling man, must either modify that admission, or must equally admit that what he said of himself must be believed. But those who assent to his divine authority have committed themselves still more fully, and are no longer at liberty to question the truthfulness of his claims. It seems to me, that, among Christians, we may narrow down this question concerning Christ to the simple inquiry, "What did he himself say?" Both as to his exaltation and authority, and as to the limitations of these, if limitations exist, we are bound, as Christians, to rest upon his testimony, and have no right either to fall short of it, or to go beyond it.

After a careful examination of this testimony, we come to a clear and positive conviction upon at least two points in the case. First, that Jesus Christ claimed for himself a degree of dignity, authority, and power, such as no one else in all the records of history has ever claimed; and, secondly, that he distinctly declared the fact of limitation, and his own entire dependence upon God. These two propositions can be fully established by any one who will read the four Gospels with care. And although they may

leave a great deal that we wish to know still unsettled, they give a firm standing-ground of evangelical and reasonable belief.

Let us examine both propositions with the Bible before us ; for I think that many will be surprised at the clearness and fulness of the proof.

In the first place, we assert that Jesus uniformly claimed for himself dignity, knowledge, authority, power ; in a word, an elevation, both of nature and of office, such as no other teacher or lawgiver ever claimed. Neither Moses nor the prophets, nor Zoroaster nor Confucius nor Mahomet, nor any other whom history names, has dared to assume the position which Jesus assumed and maintained, by word and action, in his relation both to God and man. Nor do we refer, in this assertion, to special isolated passages, which ingenious critics may explain away, or get rid of as interpolations ; but it rests still more upon the general tone of Christ's language and demeanor. The Sermon on the Mount is the utterance of a Lawgiver and Judge, who claims the right to fulfil or to destroy. "You have heard that it was said in old times ;" but "I say unto you," that a new and better law is given. He declares the terms of acceptance with God, without hesitation, and claims a personal part in their enforcement. "Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord ; but I will profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22). Heaven and earth might pass away, but "my words shall not pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 35). He declared the sins of the penitent to be forgiven, and pronounced the sternest judgment of God upon the unbelieving and rebellious. He spoke of sins that could not be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come (Matt. xii. 31). In speaking of the final judgment, or of the principles on which men will be judged, he

says, "Then shall the King" (meaning himself),—"then shall the King say, Come, ye blessed of my Father;" or "depart from me, ye accursed" (Matt. xxv. 34). "Whosoever confesses me before men, him will I also confess before the Father in heaven. Whosoever denieth me, him will I also deny" (Matt. x. 32). In speaking of the conflict of the world against himself, the chief stone of the corner, he said, "Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken; but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. xxi. 44). "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. xvi. 27). "All things are given to me of my Father," he said at another time; "and no man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27). And then, having declared this closeness of relation with God, he turns himself towards man, with the ineffable dignity of saving love and power, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When the disciples disputed concerning superiority, he rebuked them, and said, "Neither be ye called masters; for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 10). He distinctly declared himself, with a solemnity that indicates a peculiar meaning in the words, to be the Christ, the Anointed, the Messiah, "the Son of the living God;" and, when adjured by the high priest to tell them who he was, he added to such words as I have spoken, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64). He taught his disciples, that, after he should leave them, his continued assistance and prayers for them would be essential, and said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my



name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). Before his leaving them, according to the gospel record, he spake to them and said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations;" that is, make disciples of them. I ask you to observe the absoluteness of authority, the comprehensiveness of the command, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" thus introducing himself into that close affinity with God the Father, and claiming a personal place and office in the religion of the world; "teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 18).

We have thus far looked only at the Gospel of Matthew, and gleaned but a small part of the proofs which it affords. If we turn to the Gospel of John, their abundance is so great, that the recital of them would be simply to read the Gospel itself. When accused of violating the sabbath day, Jesus answered, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John v. 17). What was the point of that answer? It was as if he had said, "The creative and sustaining power of God is not suspended on the sabbath day, and under the same divine authority I go on to work." The words were so striking, that the Jews thought them blasphemous; and he explained them by saying that he did not speak of independent authority (John v. 19). He declared himself, in the strong, figurative language of Scripture, more forcible than literal words, to be "the bread from heaven" (John vi. 51, 53) which every man must eat, to partake of the heavenly life. Again he said, with great solemnity, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: he that believeth on me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 37). At another time, varying the expression but repeating the



same idea, he said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12). He called himself the door through which every man must pass (John x. 1); the vine upon which all living branches must grow, in order to bear any fruit (John xv. 1). In more literal words, he said, "No man cometh to the Father but by me" (John xiv. 6). When asserting his power to fulfil his promises, he said, "My Father who gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (John x. 29). The Jews again misunderstood him; and he explained himself as claiming delegated, not independent, power.

We are confining ourselves, you will observe, to Christ's own language concerning himself; and I have purposely avoided exceptional passages, and those which are of doubtful interpretation. The quotations given are such as to indicate the general tone of the Gospels. It is the tone of judicial authority, which could rightly be used by a divine ambassador, who knew himself to be speaking the words of divine truth, the commands of a divine law, the promises of divine love, the threatenings of divine justice. Imagine it to be assumed by any other, and it would be either blasphemy or madness. Nor can you get rid of it by any degree of critical boldness or ingenuity. Expurgate all such claims from Christ's words, and there would not be enough left to constitute a personality. The mythical system of Strauss, which is the destruction, not the expurgation, of history, would be the only result.

In this respect, at least, the life-like history of Jesus, by Renan, to which I have already referred, will do good. He makes Jesus a real personage, and divests him of all mythical appearance; so that we feel sure that such a person lived at the time, and under the circumstances, and

among the people, described in the Gospel history. But, admitting so much as this, how can we help going further? How can we avoid admitting that this Jesus being, as is supposed, a good and true man, made claims to a dignity altogether inconsistent with the idea, we do not say of advanced goodness, but even of common honesty? Listen to those words, which he spoke with such awful solemnity, and from which every believer continually derives hope and strength: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John xi. 25). And again he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John xiv. 6). And yet again, "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John vi. 40). "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John v. 26). "For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (John v. 21). "Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25). Interpret the words as you will, whether of the resurrection from sin to spiritual life, or from the grave to immortality, the language is utterly incompre-

hensible, as spoken by an honest man, without peculiar divine authority. They are imposture or madness or inspiration. Imagine them to be spoken by the best man you know, or of whom you may have read in history, and you will see how impossible they are, except under one of those suppositions. It is not only that the words are strong in themselves, and in the spiritual truth conveyed, but that they are made personal to Christ himself, as the agent of their fulfilment. Separate them from him, the speaker, and they are altogether lost. They are not abstract propositions to be proved, but personal testimony to be believed. We may verify them by the spiritual experience of personal faith; but we cannot abstract them from Jesus himself, who first proved their truth, and gave it to us as the established law of life, without denying its veracity at the same time. The Christian system is "the truth as it is in Jesus," not in abstract propositions. We cannot hold to it as Christian truth; or, at least, I cannot, when we have falsified him.

According to my reading of the Scripture, therefore, the first proposition concerning Jesus Christ is fully proved. Whether we can fix the exact point of his elevation or not, and however ignorant we may be of his essential nature, as indeed we are ignorant of our own, we have abundant evidence from his own words and demeanor, that he occupied an exceptional place, both in relation to God and man, to do a work peculiar to himself, for the glory of God, and for the salvation of the world.

It remains to prove the second proposition, that his own words and conduct equally declare a limitation of authority, and his entire dependence upon God.





## CHRIST, THE SON OF MAN.

BY W. G. ELIOT, D.D.

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"I have not spoken of myself; but the Father that sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."—  
JOHN xii. 50.

IN my last discourse, we considered Christ's "record of himself," to prove that he claimed the dignity and authority requisite for the office he came to fulfil, in the redemption of the world from sin, and to make known the heavenly Father. It was an easy task, for the Gospels are full of such testimony; and the strength of his expressions is so great, that we do not wonder at their having been interpreted to mean more than was intended by himself. It is always the tendency, in every new religion or philosophy, for the disciples to magnify their master, so as to reflect glory both upon his work and their own. Probably, no instance can be given of an opposite tendency, in the whole history of philosophies and religions, since the world began. Accordingly, we find, in the early preaching of the Apostles, that they were almost at a loss how to express their love and veneration for him whom they had followed for the redemption of Israel. A careful examination of their words would, however, show that they never forgot the difference between the Father and the Son, between the Ambassador and the Sovereign who sends him, between the Mediator who effects the reconciliation, and the infinite Law-giver who establishes the terms of acceptance. In subsequent

ages, this manifest distinction was gradually lost; but it required three full centuries and more to bring the creed of Christendom to its denial. The progress of change may be clearly marked in ecclesiastical history, step by step, from the confession made by Peter and his brethren,—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,”—to that most wonderful of all human compositions, written in the fifth century, called the Athanasian Creed. Such historical inquiries, however, are difficult and cumbersome. The language of the Apostles themselves, in their letters to the churches, is sometimes indefinite, and frequently hard of interpretation.

We must return, therefore, to Christ himself, as the best, if not the only sure, source of knowledge. The more desirous we are of doing him honor, the more confidently must we rest our faith, at last, upon his own words. We appeal to them therefore, again, in this second part of our argument, as the final and conclusive authority. If he declared a limitation of his nature and attributes, no articles of faith nor ecclesiastical authority, nor ingenuity of argument, can justify us in asserting that such limitation does not exist.

In the first place, we refer to the general tone of Christ's words and intercourse with his disciples to prove the limitations of his nature and authority, in the same manner as we referred to them to prove their elevation and extent. Negatively speaking, this argument is very strong. Try to imagine what would have been the tone and demeanor of one who was conscious of being, in some sense or other, the Infinite God; of one who spoke by his own independent authority, and who possessed, in himself, the attributes of self-existence, omnipresence, and almighty power. I think that your familiarity with the Gospels will show you, at once, how different it would have been from what we

actually read concerning Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly, his disciples, even those nearest to him, did not understand him as asserting the claim of equality with the Father. He was their friend, their kinsman, whom they gradually learned to recognize as the Messiah promised to Israel, and to whom the higher title, "Son of the Living God," could be justly given. But they questioned him with perfect freedom, expostulated with him, and once, at least, rebuked him. One of them betrayed him; all of them forsook him; and, when he was put to death, they thought it was an end of all, and that the hope of Israel was extinguished. They came to embalm his body, and refused to believe the fact of his resurrection until proved to them beyond their power of denial. How can we account for this, if his general intercourse with them, or his words concerning himself, had been those of one claiming for himself the attributes of deity?

But the argument does not rest upon this negative view. If we carefully examine Christ's language, and accompany him in the Gospel history, as he went from place to place, going about to do good, speaking the words of truth, giving the promises of eternal life, the most striking feature in the whole will be his habitual reference of every thing to God the Father. His humility and piety are as remarkable as his tone of authority, and the two traits are inseparable from each other. In his miracles, he appealed to the power of God, as that by which alone he was able to work (John v. 19, 30). He claimed to be heard and believed, because the words that he spoke were not his own, but the Father's who sent him (John vii. 16). His language and conduct were those of an ambassador, who came, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father in heaven. The highest title that he claimed, or permitted to be used concerning him, was "The Son of God;" a title which in



itself clearly implies derivation and dependence, and as clearly is inconsistent with self-existence. In several instances, he distinctly denies the attributes of deity. "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God" (Matt. xix. 17; Mark x. 18). "To sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to give; but it shall be given to those for whom it is prepared of my Father in heaven" (Matt. xx. 23). "Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32; Matt. xxiv. 36). Such language may be consistent with very high exaltation; but, if it does not declare limitation and dependence, no words could possibly do so.

There is one fact, however, which pervades the whole life of Jesus, which is to me more forcible than any words could be. I mean the fact that he lived a life of prayer and thanksgiving. He spent whole nights in prayer, and looked up to God, as he taught us to look up, in all times of trial and difficulty. Not only in the beginning of his ministry, but throughout its continuance and at its close, in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the Cross, he prayed to God as one who absolutely depended upon him, and gave thanks to God for whatever he received or was able to accomplish. (See Heb. v. 7, 8, 9.) How can we reconcile this fact, which no one will deny, with the assertion made by a part of the Christian Church, but never made by Christ himself, of absolute equality with the Father? If in any sense, and by whatever mystery of union, the Divine power was inherent in himself, how would prayer and thanksgiving have been possible? Or should we not be obliged to regard it, as some have done, as an outward show for the sake of the example? It would have been only the seeming of prayer, a self-communion, and not that which it evidently was, the outpouring of his



whole soul, the expression of absolute self-consecration to the Almighty God. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39). "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46). "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46).

I ask you to observe the peculiar force of this argument, and that it cannot be fairly met by the theory of a double nature in Christ, according to which he was both God and man. For prayer is the most interior of all spiritual experience, and is of necessity addressed to one higher than him who prays. To suppose a twofold consciousness in Christ, one conscious mind *praying* to the other, while the two are indissolubly connected with each other to constitute one person, would be to use language which both Trinitarian and Unitarian disavow, and which is so obscure that no intelligent thought of prayer would remain. He who prays truly and heartily, as Christ evidently prayed, declares the limitation of his whole nature, and the absolute supremacy of the Most High. I desire to treat the opinions of all persons with respect; and we know that some things which seem absurd to us are credible to others, because they see them at a different point of view, so that, perhaps using the same words, they mean a different thing: but I must frankly say, that I cannot comprehend how any one, who believes that Jesus Christ really prayed to God for strength and gave thanks to God for support, can also believe, in any intelligible sense of the words, that Jesus Christ was himself God, self-existent in being, independent in power.

It is not that we object to the word "mystery," or to the idea conveyed by it. To deny the fact of mystery, infinite and inscrutable, would be to stultify one's self. Human arrogance and folly can scarcely go so far. Mystery is the

law and condition of our lives. It is the infinite space which everywhere surrounds us. It is the eternity in which we live. It is the omnipresent power which sustains and directs us, while our conscious freedom is still uncontrolled. Mystery is but another word to express the fact of our ignorance and the limitations of our being. The little that we know is barely enough to indicate the infinity of knowledge and truth beyond us. "It is as high as heaven, what canst thou know? deeper than hell, what canst thou do?" The sphere of our knowledge is very small, compared with that in which faith alone must be our guide.

But we must not deceive ourselves with words. The acknowledgment of mystery does not imply belief in contradictions. If two propositions are contradictory in terms, we may perceive the contradiction, although there may remain a great deal, in the given case, of which we know nothing. If, under the name of mystery, you tell me that two parallel lines, sufficiently produced, will meet and ultimately coincide, or that a part is equal to the whole, you tell me that which is no mystery, and which we require very little knowledge to refute. It is manifestly untrue. And so, in religious inquiry, there are axioms of faith of which we may be just as sure as if we knew every thing. We cannot define the nature of God, nor can we define the nature of Jesus Christ; but if we believe that Christ is a conscious, intelligent, spiritual being, who, according to his own words, derived his being and authority from God, and habitually looked to God the Father, both in prayer and thanksgiving, as the source of all strength and life, we cannot consistently, at the same time, believe that God and Christ are the same being, or that, being different, they are equal to each other. Still less can we assert equality and identity, and the relation of depen-

dence, at one and the same time. The word "mystery" does not cover such inconsistencies of thought. For my own part, in the attempt to reconcile them, I either lose the idea of God in that of Jesus Christ, or the idea of Christ in that of God. But the Bible requires no such confusion of thought; and we prefer to rest in the words of Christ himself: "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3); words which were uttered in prayer, at a time when his earthly ministry was almost finished. \*

We have already alluded to the usual method of avoiding the argument now presented. A twofold nature is claimed for Jesus Christ, by which he was perfect God and perfect man at the same time. But there are two reasons why this answer fails, even if we are able to attach an intelligible meaning to it. In the first place, it is not asserted that Jesus had a double consciousness; for, on the contrary, unity of person and of consciousness is claimed for him. He must have spoken, therefore, and thought and acted at each particular time, as an individual. When he said "I" and "me," he must have meant *himself*, as he actually was when speaking, in his whole being. He was so understood and gave no intimation whatever of meaning any thing else. To assert that he spoke sometimes in one nature and sometimes in another, without giving intimation how he was to be understood; and, still more, that, in the same conversations, he alternated from one to the other, without explanation,—would be equivalent to asserting that we cannot understand him at all. The supposition is inconsistent with the plainness, simplicity, and truthfulness of Christ's words; and no teacher of religious truth would consent to such a rule of equivocal and ambiguous instruction. When Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John xiv. 28); and again, "I ascend to my

\* note the connection \*



Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John xx. 17); and again, "I can do nothing of myself" (John v. 30),— which was his common method of speaking, — there is but one fair and just mode of interpretation. We have no right to interpret the Bible by rules of criticism which would change any other book into prevarication and falsehood.

For another reason, the theory of a double nature fails in its purpose. Taking Christ's own language as our guide, the passages in which he claims the highest and most mysterious exaltation, and which therefore must refer to his highest nature, whatever it may be, are the same in which he most distinctly asserts the limitation both of authority and being. For example, the words, "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, and no man knoweth the Father but the Son" (Matt. xi. 27), — indicate an intimacy and exclusiveness of communion greater perhaps than anywhere else expressed. But they are immediately preceded by the words, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father," and by thanksgiving to God, by whom this elevation, however great, had been conferred: "I thank thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." He speaks of the glory in which he was to come, as "the glory of his Father." In the judgment scene, when he represents himself as the King, he says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father" (Matt. xxv. 34). When asserting his power to overthrow his enemies, he said, "Think ye not that I could pray to my Father, and he would give me twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. xxvi. 53). Before the judgment-seat of Pilate, when asserting his own future triumph, he still speaks of delegated authority: "The Son of man shall sit on the right hand of power" (Matt. xxvi. 64). When he said, "All



power is given to me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18), the words contain their own limitation, in the word "given," which implies a superior from whom the power is received, and makes it consistent with the special limitations of authority and power elsewhere expressed by Jesus himself. When Jesus said, "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John xvii. 5), we must not forget that they are words of prayer to God the Father.

I confidently challenge the Bible student to adduce a single passage of Scripture, where Christ speaks of himself in this exalted tone of authority and divine communion, in which he does not with equal distinctness declare that he spoke and worked and lived by the will and power of him whom he uniformly declared to be the only true God, the infinite and almighty Father.

But even if there were exceptions, and if we found general declarations of authority or power without limitation expressed at the same time, they would give us no embarrassment; for this is the peculiar force of the argument we are now using, that a particular negation, at any one time, has the effect of limiting all general expressions upon the same subject. Thus, if I were to say that a dictator has absolute control of all the affairs of the nation, and were to repeat the assertion a hundred times, with ever so strong language, but were to introduce a single sentence declaring that he has no control over religious affairs or over the domestic relations of society, that one expression of limitation would cover the whole ground, and modify the whole statement. It would be no longer an absolute dictatorship, but one with limited powers.

Again, although no such special limitation was directly spoken of, it might be as clearly and distinctly expressed by reference to a higher authority, as that under which all

*Corruption.*  
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the power possessed is exercised. Thus, if we should speak of a dictatorship established by the people, with absolute powers, it would not be understood as independent of the authority by which created; but, on the contrary, as restrained, and subject to discontinuance by the same power which established it. If that responsibility and ultimate obedience were denied, the dictatorship would become a usurpation, and the republic would be destroyed. However unlimited within a certain range of action, the higher authority still remains and must be acknowledged; and its acknowledgment is in itself the clearest expression of limitation and dependence. No statement of delegated powers can convey the force of independent supremacy.

You will perceive how closely this bears upon the subject in hand. Christ always refers directly to God the Father as the source of all his authority. He claimed to be heard and obeyed, because he spake what he had been commanded to speak,—as when he said, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son” (John v. 22). And again, when he claimed the power of raising the dead, in one of the most remarkable passages of the Bible, he says, “For, as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John v. 26, 27). Is it not strange that this same language is quoted to prove the self-existence of Christ? If he has “life in himself,” it is argued, and if, as said just before, “he giveth life to whom he will,” does not that imply self-existence and independent power? not observing, apparently, that the same sentence declares the source both of the power and the life, and the reason for their being given. “The Father hath given to the Son to have life in himself” is a denial of self-existence, not its assertion. “The Father

*hath given* him authority to execute judgment" is a denial of independent power, however great that power may be. Accordingly, we find, in the same conversation, and only two verses later, the following sentence: "I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John v. 30).

We contend that there is no passage in the Scripture where Christ claims higher exaltation, both of nature and of office, than in this which we have now considered, in which we find such clear and unequivocal declaration of *derived* existence and *limited* authority. If such language, under such circumstances, can be set aside, I do not see how it would have been possible for Christ to have guarded himself from misconstruction. If those words do not express limitation and dependence, then no words whatever could have done it.

Let me remind you that I am arguing only to a single point; namely, the fact of limitation. We are not speaking of degrees of exaltation, nor denying any thing short of the Infinite and Supreme. That would be a matter of subsequent inquiry, comparatively insignificant in importance. However exalted the nature and authority of Christ, so long as the fact of derivation and dependence is admitted, as he himself declared it, the difference between finite and infinite remains, with the absolute supremacy of the Father, whom he made known to us as "the only true God." Such is evidently the argument of the Apostle Paul, whose language concerning Christ is often misunderstood. In the midst of his most glowing language, speaking of Christ's kingdom, "when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power," he adds these final and conclusive words: "But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did



put all things under him; and when all things shall be subdued under him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto Him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 28).

We conclude, therefore, that Jesus did not assert for himself the supremacy of nature and attributes which subsequent times asserted for him, but that he distinctly and uniformly declared the fact of derivation, of limitation, of dependence. He was the Son of God, and declared to be so, with power to make known the will of God, to manifest the character of God, to reconcile the world to God; but in all he was the messenger of God's love, who came forth from the Father to do and to speak whatever his Father commanded him. They are his own words, and we can find no authority for going beyond them. We prove our allegiance to Christ himself by thus receiving him. We stand up for Jesus by refusing to add any thing to his testimony. We honor the Son as we honor the Father, by accepting the words of Christ concerning the Father and concerning himself. We repeat them, and would write them all over our Church and upon the living tablets of our hearts: "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."



FOURTH SERIES.]

[No. 4.

THE ATONEMENT

IN CONNECTION WITH

THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

BY

REV. F. H. HEDGE, D.D

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

BOSTON.

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

# THE ATONEMENT

IN CONNECTION WITH

## THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

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THE "Atonement," in Christian theology, is the action of Christ's ministry in bringing men by faith and obedience into right relation with God.

The death of Christ is regarded by the Christian Church as the supreme act in that mediatorial agency. An efficacy has been ascribed to it beyond the emphasis it gives to the general influence of his character and life, as an attestation of the truth, as the highest proof the Son of Man could give of the strength and sincerity of his conviction. In the view of the majority of Christians, it is a good deal more than this. According to some, it is an expiatory sacrifice required by God for the remission of sins; the satisfaction of a debt due to Divine justice, which had a right to demand the everlasting perdition of the human race as the penalty of Adam's sin, but was willing to accept the death of Christ as compensation instead. According to others, it is a demonstration or device enabling God, consistently with the fixed principles of his government, to pardon sin which else, in view of the dignity and claims of Divine law, were unpardonable. There is no essential difference in principle between these two

views. The idea of *vicarious satisfaction*, in the way of expiation or of demonstration, is common to both. The rational Christian rejects this idea, as inconsistent with those views of the Divine nature which seem to him to be the dictate of reason and the doctrine of the gospel; and which represent God as a loving Father who forgives, unconditionally, penitent sinners.

On the other hand, there is a negative extreme in relation to this matter, — a way of thinking which makes no account of the cross as an element of the Christian dispensation, which denies all value to the death of Christ, beyond the evidence it furnishes of his sincerity, and the consequent presumption it affords of his Divine authority. This view does not satisfy the Christian consciousness, no more than it does the sense of the Scripture.

Our conception of the efficacy of Christ's death, as a means of atonement, will depend on our view of the person of Christ; his place and function in the spiritual-historical economy. If we view him merely as a human individual, differing from other individuals only in the excellence of his character, the wisdom of his doctrine, and the purity of his life, the gospel history will be to us comparatively a barren tale; the true import of the facts and ideas presented by it, will be for ever hidden from our eyes. It is not thus that Jesus speaks of himself. It is not thus that he is described by his apostles. He declares himself, and they describe him, as a representative personality, — a revelation of God in man, a manifestation, a showing forth of the Divine, by which mankind are to be taught and won, redeemed from evil and united to God. "For in him," says Paul, "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Ye know," says John, "that he was manifested to take away the sins of the world." The point of view, then, from which to regard the cross of



Christ, is the idea of the God-man, — Christ a manifestation of divine humanity.

It is in the light of this idea that we are to interpret the Atonement. That central truth of the Christian system finds its best expression in these words of Christ, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." We have here the end to be accomplished, and the means by which it is to be effected. The end is spiritual emancipation, redemption from the power of earth and sin, reconciliation and union with God. The means by which it is to be effected is Christ's *drawing*, — the moral attraction of that supreme example of self-renunciation, of self-annihilation, which the cross exhibits to our reverent contemplation. As Christ is a typical personage, so all his history is typical, consequently his passion. It is a manifestation, a symbol, the contemplation of which exerts a saving influence on the mind.

Herein consists the great difference between the ecclesiastical-dogmatic, and the true, scriptural view of the death of Christ, and the Atonement, as connected with it. The former supposes the death of Christ to act *mechanically*, as a substitute for punishment and human righteousness. The other supposes it to act *morally*, as a motive and inducement to righteousness. We readily distinguish between these two modes of action, — the mechanical and the moral. We see them illustrated in analogous cases in human life. If I wish to reclaim a drunkard, I may act upon him by physical constraint, by removing from him all possible means of intoxication; or I may operate by encouragement and example, by the influence of my character and life, by a manifestation of temperance and self-denial in my own person. In the one case he is acted upon by mechanical, in the other by moral, agency. If I wish to relieve a debtor from pecuniary embarrassment,

I may release him by paying outright the sum which he owes ; or I may persuade him, by my influence and example, to such efforts as shall enable him eventually to clear himself. Again, I may train up a child in the way he should go, by enforcing compliance with certain rules, or by exhibiting in my own person a model of the virtues I wish to inculcate. In the one case, I act mechanically ; in the other, morally.

The efficacy of Christ's death, as I interpret it, is not a mechanical operation, but a moral influence. It does not save men by offering to Divine justice or Divine wrath an equivalent for punishment, or exhibiting a vicarious righteousness ; but by making men good and holy, and thus reconciling and restoring them to God. In other words, *it is not an action on the Divine mind, but on the human*. It does not influence God to forgive, but influences man to repent, and by repentance to be renewed and reconciled to God. Its influence consists in moral attraction. "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." In what, then, does this attraction consist ? How is it that Christ *draws* us by his cross ?

1. He draws us, in the first place, by the love he excites in us as a personal benefactor, as a sufferer in our behalf. This is the nearest and most superficial view of the subject. Gratitude to Christ, as a personal benefactor, is by no means the highest of Christian sentiments. Yet it is a Christian sentiment. It has a true foundation in our moral nature, and exerts a quickening and sanctifying influence on all the other sentiments and affections. The veneration we experience for one who has offered up himself for the truth, and for human weal, the gratitude we feel to him as a personal benefactor, is not only a just tribute to the object of such sentiments, but a profitable and saving exercise of that which is noblest and best in

ourselves. The martyr, who so acts on us through our affections, does more by his death to further the ends which he served, than could have been done by a lengthened life. Such virtue goes forth from the death of Christ; such in kind, but greater in degree than attends the death of other martyrs, inasmuch as his character was more exalted, his mission more extensive, his passion more sublime, than all else that history records of martyr-deeds and martyr-doom. Other heroes are identified with the limited sphere in which and for which they lived and died, — at most, with the age and country which they served; but Jesus is the hero of all times and climes. So long as the Christian world endures, his name will be the centre of history, and his sacrifice will draw all men to him. The relation which other martyrs bear to us personally is distant and faint. We honor the virtues they displayed, we acknowledge the good they accomplished; but it is only indirectly and by inference that we feel ourselves personally indebted to their lives and deaths. But the Christian believer feels towards Jesus a personal obligation, as if the Saviour of the world had had him distinctly in view, and had suffered with special reference to him, as one who should be benefited by his ministry and death. To the believing Christian, he is nearer than any character in history is or can be. We are bound with him in one bond, leagued in one interest, and that, the central interest of human life. Herein consists the peculiar attraction of that cross, by which the crucified draws his own. It is no stranger, but a brother, whom we see lifted up in that sacred "monstrance," in which the world's host was elevated to human view. The sacred heart that bled upon that wood has watered human-kind with its saving blood, — the blood of the Son of Man. It was the great and divine brother "who bore our sins in his own body on



that tree," and shed his life to gather us all into one brotherhood of faith and love.

2. Christ draws us by exhibiting in himself, on the cross, the power and beauty of a true and divine humanity. Christ, I have said, is a revelation of God in man; in other words, of humanity re-instated in the likeness of the Godhead, in which it was conceived. As the Son of God, he represents the Divine; as the Son of Man, he is the representative of the human, — the ideal man; the visible bodying forth of the perfect and divine humanity. All that we behold in him is essentially human, — human in its rudiment and type and idea, if not customary in its manifestation. And, although providentially, officially, he occupies a place peculiar to himself, — psychologically, there was nothing in him that is not, in its germ and possibility, in all men; and which all, in the full unfolding of their humanity, may not hope to realize. Nowhere but in Jesus has our nature reached so ostensibly its true perfection; and, but for him, we had not known what that nature is in its possibility and its calling, — its highest and deepest capacity and strength.

Many wise and good have blessed the world with their living and with their dying; heroes have poured forth their lives on the battlefield, a free libation for their country's good; confessors have given their bodies to be burned, a willing sacrifice to truth; sages have received, in the solitude of their prisons, the cup of death; but nowhere, as in him, has Divinity incarnated itself. There is none in whom the idea is so discriminated from earthly circumstance, so lifted out of its environment and brought so near to us, as in Christ. In him we behold, as in a mirror, what manner of beings we are and behoove to be, — our actual and possible self. In his virtues we behold our defects; in his greatness, our littleness; our weakness in



his strength. At the same time, the qualities which shine forth in him reveal to us an inner man, a Christ yet unformed in the depths of the soul, which the contemplation of that historical Christ is fitted to unfold. Thus, he, in his moral elevation, draws after him all, who, "beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory." Nowhere does the spiritual supremacy of Christ appear so conspicuous as in the closing scene of his earthly career. There we behold the human raised to its highest grandeur, in the final conquest over self and the world. We need not ask if other martyrs have not borne as much, and suffered as keenly, as the Son of Man. Enough that we have here an image, clear and distinct, of humanity triumphant in the last extreme, bearing all and conquering all that man can endure or life inflict. This is not strength of will opposing itself to the power of fate, such as ancient tragedy described, in the chained Prometheus, as the highest in man; but the deeper strength which springs from entire subjection of the will in willing endurance. In the contemplation of the cross, we behold humanity "lifted up from the earth," exalted, transfigured, victorious over fear and pain and every worldly ill, made perfect by suffering, by self-crucifixion *atoned*, — at one with God. We perceive how far this ideal of manhood transcends all others; we accept it as the highest to which man can attain, as the deification of the human; we feel our human nature renewed by the blood of Christ, drawn to the crucified as its apotheosis, the realization of its utmost power.

3. Christ draws us by revealing with the cross the true significance of sorrow, thus reconciling the soul to inevitable ill, and persuading to the renunciation of the selfish, carnal, pleasure-seeking, earth-bound life. Man is by nature epicurean; he regards pleasure as his natural right,

evil as a cross accident, a needless imposition, instead of a necessary element in the scheme of things. So long as we indulge this view, we add new poignancy to inevitable woes, and lose our life in vain attempts to save it. Suffering is not an accident, but a fixed part and a necessary constituent of human life, which, though we escape it for a season, we must sometime abide, and which it is better to accept with patient endurance than to fight against with useless strife. We must be reconciled to sorrow, before we can be truly reconciled to God. This is the doctrine of the cross, that mystic symbol which God has set up in the midst of human history, a type of all earthly grief and pain. To the frank and reverential acceptance of that symbol we are invited by the contemplation of Christ in his humiliation and passion. "If any man come to me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple; and whoso doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Closely connected with this idea of self-renunciation is that of sacrifice. The death of Christ is a sacrifice, not in the sense of vicarious satisfaction, but of self-immolation. And this is the meaning of all ritual sacrifice. The sacrifices which form so prominent a feature in the ancient religions, Jewish and Gentile, meant the same thing. They were symbolical. They typified, by the shedding of blood, the seat of the soul, the putting away of self, the seat of sin, — the shedding of the selfish, sinful nature by which we are separated from God, and the renunciation of which is atonement with him. This idea the New Testament transferred from the blood of lambs and goats to the blood of Christ. "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

To the sacrifice of self, then, we are exhorted by the cross of Christ. His sacrifice is only then effective as

atonement for us, when reproduced, as it were, in our own life. So long as there remains in us a principle of action that rebels against God, so long as our wills are opposed to his, so long do we resist the drawing of the cross, and are unreconciled to God in Christ. But when we feel in our hearts that divine attraction, and respond to it with our lives; when self is offered up, and the will of God has become to us in theory the supreme good; and our life, by voluntary sacrifices for duty's sake, illustrates our theory with practical obedience, — then we are not only partakers in the great historical atonement in Christ, but we, too, according to the grace that is given us, atone for others, and, as far as our influence extends, become a sacrifice and a propitiation for the sins of men.

Christianity has been termed a “worship of sorrow.” Whatever of truth or of error there may be in that phrase, thus much is undoubtedly true, that the deepest in Christ is best known to those who, with strong sympathy, partake of his passion and enter into his death. Who bear the dying of the Lord Jesus, in them is made manifest his life. There is one view of life which represents happiness as the true end and only good, which bids us shun sorrow, and take our fill of earthly pleasure. There is another view which represents duty as the chief end and good, and teaches us to take up the yoke of necessary ill. These were the opposite views of ancient philosophy, “the Epicureans and the Stoics,” the latter of which is Christian as far as it goes. But the gospel teaches a diviner wisdom: it teaches not only to bear with patience inevitable ill, but voluntarily to renounce something of earthly pleasure and worldly possessions for the sake of other and higher satisfactions, — our own and others' spiritual good. It teaches, in a parable of sorrow, the mystery of life. It sets up a cross by the way, and bids us crucify our love of pleasure and of self



Great is the import of the cross in the Christian scheme. Nothing more signally illustrates the exterior triumph and historical success of the gospel than that reverend symbol, which, once abhorred and accursed,—an instrument of torture, a sign of guilt and an emblem of shame,—has become a glory and a grace and an idol of the world. Once forbidden within the fold of civil walls, and approached with horror and trembling through the “execrable gates” of cities, it has come to flaunt on regal brows; it crowns the solemn temple; it flames in the battle’s van; it glitters on beauty’s breast; it is curiously carved in wood and stone; it is framed of jewels and gold. In the centre of the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome, once the stronghold of polytheism, it occupies the ground where the followers of the crucified were thrown to the lions, or transfixed with the sword. All who behold it revere and bless it. So mightily has the name of the crucified prevailed over the names and kingdoms of the world. The symbol has triumphed: how fares it with the truth which that symbol imports? The name has conquered, but what of the way and the life? The cross which piety honors, and which saving faith embraces, is not that which is made with hands and figured to the eye, but that which is borne in the heart and the life.

It was said by one of the wisest of the moderns, that “only with renunciation can life be truly said to begin.” On other grounds, and in quite another spirit, Christ says, “He that seeketh his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” “I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies—your lives—a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, unto the Lord, which is your reasonable service.”



FOURTH SERIES.]

[No. 3.

# HUMAN NATURE

NOT RUINED, BUT INCOMPLETE.

BY

REV. C. C. EVERETT.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

BOSTON.

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

## HUMAN NATURE NOT RUINED, BUT INCOMPLETE.

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BY REV. C. C. EVERETT.

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Two theories of Human Nature are often expressed, neither of which is wholly true, and neither of which is fully believed, even by those who have adopted it as their own. One of these theories is that human nature is wholly evil; the other is that human nature is wholly good and perfect. One explains all the evil in the world by the utterly depraved natures of the individuals who make up society; the other explains the sins of the individual by the evil which he finds embodied in the outer world. To the one, each separate life is a turbid stream, polluting the fair earth; to the other, each new life is a fountain sweet and pure, whose waters will soon become polluted by the mire through which they flow. Neither of these theories is fully believed. Those who insist most strongly on the total depravity of human nature, we find recognizing, in actual life, the native virtues of the soul; while those who insist on the perfect purity of the individual nature at its birth, recognize differences in character, and original predispositions to certain faults or vices. Neither of these theories can be wholly true. If man is wholly evil, whence the good that is in the world? If man is

wholly good, whence the evil? The doctrine of the total depravity of man, indeed, confutes itself. If it is my nature to do what we call evil, then it ceases to be evil. The lines of Dr. Watts suggest a truth that may be applied to every sphere of life. We say, —

“Let dogs delight to bark and bite,  
For God hath made them so;  
Let bears and lions growl and fight,  
For 'tis their nature too.”

We call a man sinful in proportion as he lives like the beasts; but if that is his nature, if God has made him so, it ceases to be sin. It is a well-known fact, that a large part of this continent, as well as of Europe, was once covered with glaciers. Scientific men formerly attempted to explain this accumulation of glacial ice, by showing how a period of intense cold might have been brought upon the earth. The colder the earth of the past, the better, they thought, they understood this glacial action. It is now known, that, in such intense cold, no glacier could have been formed. Heat is needed to cause such an accumulation of vapor from the ocean, that, when it congealed, it should settle down in these almost inconceivable masses. A wholly evil nature cannot sin, more than a wholly cold world can produce glaciers. There is needed within the nature a principle or a possibility of goodness to make sin possible.

If we leave our theories, and look at the world as it is, we find good and evil side by side; we find even the germs of good and evil side by side, in every individual nature. Our problem is to understand the relation in which these two elements stand to one another.

When we look more closely, we find that all virtues stand in a certain connection with one another. Together, they form a perfect whole. Each is needed by all the rest for



their completeness; and each needs all the rest, or it is imperfect. We can conceive of an ideal man in which all virtues exist, each in its true proportion, and together form a beautiful and complete unity. This possible perfection and harmonious co-existence we see to be the plan after which human nature is shaped. This completed plan is what we strive to realize in our dreams, our romances, our loves and aspirations. We cannot conceive, as was just stated, of a being wholly evil. We can conceive, and cannot help conceiving, of a being wholly good. There is thus the trace of plan and system in the goodness, while the evil is only the imperfection and interruption of this ideal plan.

The question now meets us, Is this perfect nature, of which we can trace the imperfect and scattered elements, ruined or incomplete? When we see these scattered human virtues, of which no life is wholly destitute, and which, in spite of sin and wrong, ennoble the world, are we looking upon the ruins, the broken arches, the crumbling pillars, of a past perfection; or are we looking at the broad foundation and uprising columns of a perfection that is yet to be? According as we take one or the other of these views is our thought of humanity sad or hopeful. To many, the grandest exhibition of human virtue can be only sorrowful. It can remind them only of the greatness of their loss. If a fragment is so fair, what must have been the original magnificence? Not merely do they wander among ruins; these ruins are blasted by a curse. It was the bolt of the wrath of God that scattered the fair structure; and whatever remains, however beautiful at first sight, is yet scarred by the mark of his anger. To others, the virtues of human life have a grace and a joy that are not in themselves. They are not merely lovely: they are the prophecies of the grander loveliness that is to come. The world is to them

no ruin blasted and accursed. They see the city of God slowly forming itself out of the chaos; and they see, above all, the smile of God's blessing.

We can determine which of these theories is true, only by considering the arguments upon which they rest. The belief that human nature is a ruin, blasted by the curse of God, rests upon the story of the fall of man, as it is related in the book of Genesis, and supported by the traditions of other nations, that speak of a golden age in the distant past. What is the element of human nature, from which springs the tendency to this backward-looking glance, by which individuals, as well as races, turn so often with sad longing to their early years, we need not here inquire; neither is there a necessity for examining the authority of the passage in Genesis to which reference has been made. The incident of the speaking serpent, and of the formation of woman from a rib taken out of the side of Adam, would seem to remove this narration from the sphere of literal history. The name of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil"—a tree which grows only in the gardens of the soul—would seem to imply that the story was not originally intended to be received as historic fact; while the yielding of Adam and Eve to the very first temptation would show that they could not have been originally very different from the weakest of their descendants. The Greek legend of Pandora is commonly related, as if Pandora brought, in a chest, to man, all the evils of life. The genuine legend was different. Man, it relates, had all the evils of life locked up in a box, from which they could not escape. Pandora persuaded him to lift the lid, and they came forth, and filled the earth with grief and terror. Such is the true conception of the fall of man, in contrast with the one commonly held. The heart of man was the sealed chest, which contained all sins and woes. Temptation could not

bring them. It could only persuade man to lift the fatal lid. The story of the fall has a sublime truth and significance; but its truth does not lie on the plane of history, and its significance does not concern the hard facts which mark the beginning of the development of the human race.

For the belief that human nature is not ruined, but incomplete, we have the unvaried testimony of history, so far as history has traced the course of human development. History is, indeed, and always will be, imperfect. It has not reached, and probably never will reach, the beginning of the life of man upon the earth. But, so far as it has penetrated backward, it has found itself tending towards the savage or barbarous state; and the earliest traces of human presence are the traces of savage or barbarous life. Even the book of Genesis, which describes the fair beginning of human history, shows traces of a preceding polytheism. Its very words, the words put into the mouth of the Creator himself, are half-converted heathen. The conception is monotheistic; but the language, "Let us make man in our image," is polytheistic. This is not the place for historic detail or discussion. I know the mystery which broods over the first life of man upon the earth. What agencies of creation or of elevation were at work, it is not for us, at present, to say. It is only a flippant conceit that can give unhesitating judgment. We can only say, that, so far as known facts can be laid hold of, the history of the human race has been a progressive one. We can take this for a certainty; while the assumption of a fall, from the effects of which this progress is a slow emerging, is purely hypothetical, and may be left out of the account, until we have some historical ground to sustain it.

If it be true, as history represents, that the race of man is progressing from a state of savage and barbarous



life to a life of love and knowledge, to the refinements of civilization, and to the inspiration of Christianity, we have a satisfactory solution of the great problem of the mingled good and evil in life. We should be prepared to find all the wrong and the violence that we do find. From half-civilized savages what more could we expect? The law of hereditary descent, which is elsewhere so powerful, cannot be disregarded here. We find even in our household pets traces of the wild life of their remote ancestors; and we must believe that only very slowly would the tendencies inwrought by ages of barbarous life be eliminated from the very structure of the race. Then, too, our habits of thought, our prejudices, our habits of feeling, our forms of government, our literature, our theologies, are all of the past. Each generation has its successor in its training, and it has been so from the beginning. Very slowly, then, can humanity have moved along its way. Moreover, as this elevation of the race, and of the individuals that compose it, depends upon a moral purpose; whenever this purpose is temporarily missing, there will be a lapse, a sliding-back, so that the ground won will have to be won over again. This is the disturbing effect of sin in human history,—of sin which is the close-following shadow of freedom.

It will be seen that this is no rose-colored view of human nature. It recognizes all its faults, its vices, its sins. It recognizes the hard selfishness which forms so great an element even in our most advanced society. But it recognizes also the virtues of humanity. It has a place for all the flashes of nobility and of self-sacrificing heroism, which have glorified, at however rare intervals, the history of every race. It has a place for those individuals who seem to us perfect, who are themselves the prophecies and the exemplars of the coming completeness of that common



nature of which they are partakers. It has a place for the scattered and often hidden beginnings and hints of a better nature, which we find even in the most depraved. Still more, it recognizes the royal claims and bearing of virtue, wherever it appears, and the homage which the lowest and the vilest pay to it. Virtue does not appear upon the earth as vanquished or dethroned. Its dignity is not traditional, due by courtesy to its past supremacy. Virtue, wherever it appears, feels itself young and strong, the heir of the world; and men recognize, by a certain instinctive prescience, the reality of its coming power.

We need hardly ask, whether the belief that human nature is a melancholy ruin of the past, or that it is indeed as yet incomplete, but sublime already with the grandeur of its coming perfection, falls in best with the tendencies and instincts of the present. The theory that human nature is a ruin might have been believed, indeed, among the corruptions that marked the period when the Roman Empire was tottering to its fall, and men fancied that the world itself was hastening to its end. It might be believed, perhaps, even now, in the old world, where tradition still controls the lives, if not the hearts, of men. It might be believed at other periods in the history of the world; but in this nineteenth century, in the midst of the untrammelled thought and the fresh springing life of this new world, such a doctrine can have neither place nor power. It lies athwart the course of all the ideas and principles which mark the present. Faith in man is the form, which, in the present age, faith in God pre-eminently takes. Men once fancied that they honored God by degrading, in their thought, the nature of man. Now men can find no better way of honoring God than by recognizing the traces of the reflection of his perfections, however faint and scattered, in the human soul. All the great movements of the present

rest on this faith in human nature. The world is slowly becoming democratic. In remote nations and in divers ways, we find, the principle of democracy is becoming more and more the ruling power. In this nation, it is fully recognized in theory, however imperfectly in fact, as the one central and fundamental principle; and democracy can have no other basis than faith in human nature. Even the church in America, which involves the most delicate and the loftiest relations of the soul, rests upon a popular basis. No matter what the professed belief of any church may be; when it throws itself, fully and unreservedly, upon the people for its support, it shows that it has faith in the people, in those religious instincts which are its only firm foundation, in that love of the highest which seeks to embody itself in outward form and service.

This faith in human nature is not merely faith in what it is, but still more faith in what it is to be. The only basis of reform must be the belief, that what can now get a footing, however slight, will hereafter stand on a foundation which cannot be shaken. You leave your boat on the sloping beach, just where the ripples of the ebbing tide can lap, though they cannot float it. Do you not fear that it will be swept away? You know that the waves, which now just float about it, in a few moments will not reach it; that they will sink away, and leave it every moment further inland. Such confidence do we have in whatever embodies the purest principles of right. If it can obtain a foothold, we are secure. The wrong and prejudice that threaten it, that almost sweep it from its foundation, we know will recede in an ebb that will be succeeded by no flood-tide, and leave it, not merely unmoved, but unthreatened.

The belief, that human nature is not ruined, although as yet incomplete, involves the fairest promise of the future. When we look backward only, we might feel proud of our

attainments: when we look forward, we are humbled. The mountain-side is not half scaled. When we look down, we grow giddy with the height that we have reached; but when we look up, and see the summit as far removed in appearance as if we had not begun to climb, our dizzy pride leaves us. The philanthropy, the science, the civilization, of the future will excel ours, as ours does the past. Compare Christianity with Christ, and you will see the difference between the Christianity of the present and that of the future.

The truth we are considering applies to the individual as well as to the race. The most sunken soul is not a hopeless ruin; the loftiest is not yet complete. Channing seems to us a perfect man. Yet Channing drew his strongest faith in immortality from the prophecy of completeness, contained in the unfinished plan even of his own being.

Who does not feel within himself like hints of what he might be, but is not? What character can we become familiar with, which does not give us hints of what it was meant to be, but is not yet? Even from what we see, we can guess at the ideal which that particular character is meant to reach. Or, when we cannot find this in ourselves and others, we find it in our thought of Jesus. It does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that we shall be like him. Let us, then, strive after the highest and the best. Let us take nothing less than Christ himself for our pattern; knowing, that, though our natures are imperfect, they are not deserted by the loving inspiration of God, and that we are meant to grow up, in all things, unto Him who is our Head.



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# PRAYER.

BY

REV. R. P. STEBBINS, D.D.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

BOSTON.

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Cambridge: Stereotyped and Printed by John Wilson & Son.

# PRAYER.

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BY REV. R. P. STEBBINS, D.D.

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IN this age of intense activity, — accumulating riches with feverish anxiety, extending the boundaries of science in all directions with astonishing rapidity, and dispensing charities with a profusion akin to the Divine beneficence, — there is danger of disregarding and forgetting our connection with the unseen and eternal. Man is not only an efficient actor : he is an abundant receiver. Influences flow into him as well as out of him. Heavenly dews descend upon the soul as well as upon the soil. Man aspires as well as plans. He is conscious of the spiritual as well as of the material. He is conscious of his dependence as well as of his strength. He lifts his soul in prayer as well as his hand in labor. He feels his kinship with the skies. “Alone, of all earthly beings,” says an eminent statesman, “man prays. Among his moral instincts, there is none more natural, more universal, more invincible, than prayer. The child cherishes it with a warm earnestness. The old flee to it as to a refuge against decay and loneliness. Prayer rises spontaneously upon young lips which can hardly lisp the name of God, and upon dying lips too feeble to pronounce it. Among all peoples, celebrated or obscure, civilized or barbarous, one encounters at every

step acts and forms of invocation. Everywhere where man lives, in certain circumstances, at certain hours, under the control of certain impulses of the soul, the eyes are raised, hands are joined, knees are bent, to implore or give thanks, to adore or deprecate. With transport or with trembling, publicly or in the privacy of his heart, man betakes himself to prayer in the last resort, to fill the emptiness of his soul, or to relieve the burdens of his lot: it is in prayer that he seeks, when every thing else fails him, support in his feebleness, consolation in his griefs, and hope for his virtue." The soul as naturally pours itself in prayer as the mountain bird warbles, or the mountain spring overflows. The religious experience of all ages and nations is indeed redolent with devotion and prayer. Jesus not only consecrated the mountain and the desert by his prayers, but he prayed with his disciples. Paul and Silas made the prison a temple by their prayers. Prayer was made without ceasing by the saints. At the grave; by the bed of the dying; in the chamber of sickness; in the hour of separation when friends were parted; in the day of return which welcomed them home; in festive hours, when the heart was joyous, and the day bright; in sorrow, when the spirit fainted and the heart was riven; in every condition of retirement and society, of hope and fruition, of prosperity's blessing or adversity's blight; everywhere where there was a blessing to seek or be grateful for, a want felt and to be supplied, — there was the place, then was the hour, for prayer.

I know, that some persons, especially the young, think there is a shadow, a sadness, covering the hour of prayer. As well might one speak of sadness when the child pours its griefs into its mother's bosom, and finds relief; or floods her ears with tones of joy, and deepens and lengthens its bliss thereby. I know that when sin has mottled



the soul's whiteness, and conscience accuses us of wrong, the petition for forgiveness falters on our lips, and we look up timidly, speak tremblingly, still in hope, still in faith; but the nearer we approach the mercy-seat, the greater our assurance, the warmer our fervor, till the hesitating petition for pardon is changed into ardent gratitude for acceptance. As the erring child hesitates and halts as it approaches its father whom it has wronged, and shrinks and trembles as it implores forgiveness, looking timidly up into his face, rendered indistinct by its tears, to read the expression of acceptance or rejection, yet at last rushes confidently and joyfully into his extended arms, and, thrilled with delight, reposes on his bosom as it sees the benignant smile and hears the encouraging word; so the sinning soul may feel sad, and tremble and hesitate, when at a distance he resolves to seek his Father's house and blessing, and sees the green, fresh fields, and the paternal mansion, and the open door, and the Infinite Father from afar: but, when he approaches, his fears diminish as the distance diminishes, till his sobs of penitence are changed into outpourings of trust and of gratitude. No: the hour of prayer is not an hour of sadness; the place of prayer is not a place of darkness: it is an hour of deep and holy peace and joy; it is a place of transfiguration bathed in light from Heaven. Calmness, serenity, usually fill the soul. Sometimes, however, the billows of sorrow may so break over us that sharp agony may pain us; but angels will visit us, as they did Jesus, and still the storm, and give us peace. Or, on the other hand, our joy may be so deep, so thrilling, that ecstasy may fill the hour and heart; but, after we have poured our gushing gratitude into the inclining ear of the Father, a serene, a tranquil joy succeeds our exultation. This is one of the eminent blessings of prayer: it gives serenity, calmness, peace, trust,

after the anxieties of expectancy, the exultations of success, the agonies of sorrow and bereavement. And such hours are the most precious. The deepest and most desirable and most permanent joy is not where the laughter and song are loudest. These are superficial and temporary. These are ripples, eddies, on the surface of joy, showing its shallowness, not its depths. We are always pensive and thoughtful when we are most happy. As the tidal wave climbs up the shore, hour by hour, when not a ripple ruffles the surface of the water till it fills and floods every waiting pool and winding inlet; so the serene joys of devotion, though no music murmurs on the lips, no laughter sparkles in the eye, bathe and refresh the thirsty recesses of the aspiring soul.

I say, then, that the hour of prayer is a pleasant hour: it is as the small rain upon the tender herb, as the gentle dew upon the thirsty plant.

But *why? wherefore?* *What is prayer*, that it will make us thus tranquil and joyous, thus calm and trustful? *What is prayer*, that it purifies and exalts us, helps us to live worthily and hopefully? *What is it*, that the young should kneel in their buoyancy and brightness; that the joyful should gather at its shrine, and offer thanksgiving; that the sad should look upward, and dry their tears; that morning should be welcomed by its voice, and evening made fragrant by its incense?

To pray is to ask for what we need, to return thanks for what we receive, to implore forgiveness for our sins. It is to seek guidance in difficulty, strength in weakness, wisdom in ignorance, aid in duty. It is to invoke a blessing upon past endeavors, and help in future undertakings: it is to commit ourselves, and all whom we love, trustfully to our heavenly Father's care. Prayer is not a cold, formal repetition of words, at set times, in set tones, in

consecrated places. It is the gushing-up of the soul's desires, the overflowing of the soul's gratitude, the struggling confession of its short-comings, the expression of its resolves, its consecrations. It is an irrepressible sense of want seeking supplies from the Infinite Fulness. It is aspiration climbing along the craggy pathways to the Fountain of all joys and fruitions.

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near."

Emotions may take the place of speech, and aspiration of petition.

When prayer is offered unitedly in the congregation, the penitence, the gratitude, the petition, are embodied in words by him who leads the devotions, so that all hearts can join in one request, utter one thanksgiving; and thus all things be done decently and in order. But, when one prayeth alone, all form is disregarded, and man speaketh freely to his heavenly Father. No other voice is to join with his, no other hearts are to be lifted heavenward by his devotions. His words, if words he uses, are his own. All restraint is removed. The filial spirit overflows and enjoys. In a word, which comprehends all and expresses all, prayer is a child's intercourse with its parent, — so free, so confiding, so joyous, so natural.

I need not pause here, and ask if this is not an elevating, refining, gratifying service, — a holy privilege as well as a sacred duty. Is it strange that men should pray? Is it wonderful even that prayer should sometimes become

a superstition, and its form a charm? So natural, so spontaneous is it, that the wonder the rather is that men do not pray always and everywhere. It is wonderful, passing strange, that one can doubt and hesitate, and refuse to pray; that he can do such violence to his nature as to suppress its aspirations heavenward, and restrain the word of devotion which rushes to his lips. This is wonderful: this is strange.

This fact teaches us *why* we should pray. It is because we *cannot help it*, unless we do, or have already done, a grievous wrong to our natures. These upward yearnings must be gratified, these aspirations heavenward must ascend, the necessity of aid must be relieved, or the soul, through all its vital tissues, will feel the wrong. How low must one have sunk who never feels them! How the turbid currents of worldliness and appetite must have torn in their fury, and clogged in their foulness, all the tissues of that spirit which neither feels gratitude for success, nor a disposition to express it if felt; who neither recognizes, nor if recognized will acknowledge, the presence and providence of God in his blessings or his sorrows; who lives an orphan under the very shadow of his Father's protecting hand! God in mercy quicken such hearts, unseal such eyes, that they may behold his presence and feel his care!

I go further than this. I not only affirm that prayer is a *natural* act of man, and that to restrain prayer would be doing violence to his highest nature: I say also, that this spirit of devotion **MUST BE NURTURED** to be healthy, to be preserved even. As to all other emotions and affections, so to this neglect brings disease, feebleness, extinction. Exercise, indulgence, is the life of the emotions. We must aspire, or we shall grovel. We must pray filially, or we shall pray profanely. We must adore, or



we shall blaspheme. We must soar where the seraphs sing, or we shall sink where the serpents hiss. If a devout, a grateful spirit is natural and holy, then it becomes a duty, a necessity, to watch its inspirations, to diligently cherish every devotional impulse, and pour our souls in prayer when the spirit breathes upon us.

More than this: We should pray because *devotion is the mother of other virtues*, consecrates all virtues. It makes fragrant other services of heart and hand, as the cedar-tree perfumes all the grove. It clarifies the intellect and warms the heart; it invigorates resolution and insures performance; it repels temptation and inspires goodness. Let experience speak.

Here is a man about to enter upon the duties of the day. He has laid his plans, and is about to execute them. He is to-day going to take advantage of the weakness and ignorance of his neighbor, and wrong him of both estate and reputation, not in violation of law, but according to law, — according to its letter, not according to its spirit. The hour of prayer comes. He prays: he asks a blessing on the day's duties and labors; he hesitates; he pauses. "Pray for hardness and deceit? pray for aid from the Father to wrong his child?" Never, never! The scheme is abandoned, the stain on the soul's whiteness bleached by repentance. The transaction, when seen in the light of the Father's countenance, is transformed from attractiveness to repulsiveness, from lawful barter to a brother's robbery.

Again: Here is one who has been wronged, — deeply, sorely wronged, — and he not only has not forgiven the wrong, he is seeking revenge, not recompense; he is plotting how he may take it. He discovers a way; and he exults, that, before the next day's sun goes down, he shall taste the sweets of retaliation, give in full measure in-

jury for injury. Before he closes his eyes in sleep, he prays for protection, for forgiveness. The words of that simple yet comprehensive prayer of our Saviour are on his lips: "Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me."—"What! is this the ground of pardon? How can I thus pray? Is it not solemn mockery to pray for forgiveness if I do not forgive? to seek for mercy when I show no mercy?" The burning passion cools; the cherished revenge is cast out; the victim of his hatred becomes the object of his pity and forgiveness; and so prayer repels the tempter, rescues from wrong-doing.

He who daily prays must live virtuously. I do not say, he who daily utters the words and takes the posture of prayer, but he who *prays*. No man, living in daily violation of what he believes to be the will of his heavenly Father, can ask that Father's aid. Will the evil-doer invoke the presence and the benediction of God on his evil deeds? Never, till his nature is inverted, and all his moral instincts are dead. Prayer, then, is our refuge in temptation: we are rescued from evil-doing thereby.

More than this: Prayer is more than a strong-hold in which we are secure.

"The closet which the saint devotes to prayer  
Is not his tower only, but his temple,  
Whither he goes for blessing and renewal."

We should pray because the soul is invigorated by it. Our good resolutions are strengthened, our prostrate faith is lifted up. The labor which seemed so difficult that we shrank from it is now undertaken with ardor; for the Omnipotent One is our helper. Our loneliness is relieved by the Father's presence. We become pure by a consciousness of the presence of Infinite Purity: all low, unworthy, selfish purposes and desires are put far away from us, and loftier, nobler, fraternal desires and purposes take their

place. And often, in the hour of devotion, we find strength to rise above the passions and appetites which before and elsewhere had ruled us with such despotic power. The more pervasive our devotion, the more entire our self-control, the more complete our self-mastery. These are the results of prayer flowing from our nature, originating in it.

*But God is not inactive.* He helps us. We are not only cheered by the consciousness of his approbation, but we are lifted by his hand, taught by his inspiration, sanctified by his spirit. God gives while we seek. Is not our heavenly Father more willing to give good gifts to those who ask him, than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children? Do you ask how he *can*? Has he not the power, who guideth Arcturus and his sons, and looseth the bands of Orion? Has he not the blessing, whose is the earth, and the fulness thereof, and the glory of the firmament? "*Will he hear us?*" Has he not said it in his word? has he not written it on the living tablet of our hearts? has he not promised it by implanting this ineradicable instinct in our souls, in all souls? Has the infinite Father mocked the hopes, the trust, of his child? Never, oh, never! God answers our prayers. We may be assured of receiving what we ask for in filial trust; or what is better than that for which we ask, when we ask amiss. Prayer is not, as the philosophers tell us, simply self-excitation, chafing the skin, irritating the throat, fretting the emotions, the blessedness of making moral muscle by struggling at our shoe-latchets to lift ourselves to heaven. Oh, no, no! it is no such folly as that. It is asking favor of God; and he gives it. The blessing of prayer is not simply improving our vocabulary of devotion, and hallowing our emotions by a thoughtfulness of God's presence. The blessing of prayer is more



than this, much more than this. It is a gift bestowed because it was sought, and so in our weakness we are made strong. God breathes upon the upward-looking spirit, and we are refreshed. As a child does not ask its father for a favor simply from the pleasure of being in its father's presence, and addressing him; so God's child does not pray simply for the joy which the privilege gives, but for the blessing which the Father has promised to bestow upon those who ask him.\*

*When* should we pray, then, if such is the blessedness, such the spirit, of prayer? We should pray when we feel our need; when the trials of life press upon us, and we want help; when the blessings of life are heaped upon us, and gratitude rises to our lips. When adversity overtakes us, let us pray for courage; when prosperity showers abundance, let us offer thanksgiving; when morning dawns, let us implore aid in our duties; when evening darkens, let us seek forgiveness for the wrong, acceptance of the right, and protection in our sleep. In the retirement of solitude, let us pray: there, the flame of devotion burns most steadily, most purely, and ascends to heaven most swiftly. But we may pray elsewhere. In the midst of toil, we may send up a devout aspiration, offer a hearty thanksgiving. But he who prays nowhere else save in the crowd, under the burden of toil, amidst the tumult of the multitude, will find his offering poor and his incense earthly. Solitude must often be sought, that fresh fire

\* I cannot persuade myself that it is necessary to say a word respecting the object of prayer, to whom our prayers should be addressed. Our blessed Lord has taught all who are willing to be taught, "Pray to thy Father."—"After this manner pray ye, Our Father."—"In that day ye shall ask me nothing: verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."—"For this cause," says Paul, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let this suffice



from heaven may descend, and kindle the sacrifice. But we need not always pray there. Surrounded by the clamor of the world, the din of business, the shouts of the rushing throng, our aspirations may sometimes go up gratefully to heaven, as did the cloud of incense from the golden altar in the temple on Moriah, though hostile hosts surrounded it, and the shout of battle rolled and reverberated through its pillared courts. In the midst of the collisions and strifes of the market and the court, the rumbling of wheels and the din of machinery, the expectant ear may hear the answering words of peace and deliverance, as the longing, watching maiden, at the desperate siege of Lucknow, amid the thunder of artillery, the groans of the wounded, and the cries of the starving, caught the distant pibroch note, prophecy and promise of rescue and salvation. Pray, then, everywhere. Pray when peril confronts us, and we faint. Pray when sickness weakens us, and we despair. Pray at the marriage where young hearts are pledged for ever.

“Kneel down by the side of the tearful fair,  
And strengthen the perilous hour with prayer.”

Pray when the young mother imprints the holy kiss on the brow of her first-born ; —

“Hour of bliss when the heart o'erflows  
With rapture a mother only knows.”

Pray when the generous son, brother, father, husband, go forth from the sanctuary of home, to seek their fortune, or discharge their duty, in distant fields, on distant seas ; —

“For the perils of sea and perils of field  
Sad harvests of sorrow and sadness may yield.”

Pray when the soul is unfolding its wings for paradise, —

“And commend the spirit to God who gave;  
Lifting the thoughts from the cold, dark grave.”

Pray in the assembly of the people, when families go up to the sanctuary in company;—

“For the hallowed hour that God has blest  
Invites to prayer with its welcome rest.”

Pray everywhere, with all prayer and supplication. Let all pray that sorrow may be turned into joy, and joy be hallowed by gratitude. Let all pray that youth may be fragrant with excellence, and age mature with virtue, that both blossom and fruit may be acceptable to God our Father.

“Child, amidst the flowers at play,  
While the red light fades away;  
Mother, with thine earnest eye,  
Ever following silently;  
Father, by the breeze of eve  
Called the harvest work to leave;  
Pray! ere yet the dark hours be,  
Lift the eye and bend the knee.”

Oh! what hour is there of life's duties or life's joys, life's sorrows or life's successes, which does not invite to prayer? It purifies the temple of the heart, which becomes thereby a sanctuary for the abode of the Father. Here, it is true, as we pilgrims journey to our rest, tears of penitence mingle with our offerings of gratitude; as we climb the heights of deliverance, sighs are wafted upward with our thanksgivings:—

“But the ransomed shout to their glorious King,  
Where no sorrow shades the soul as they sing;  
A sinless and joyous song they raise,  
And their voice of prayer is eternal praise.”

Oh, let us, by devout prayerfulness, and heavenly aspiration, and perpetual thanksgiving, be ready to join them in their lofty anthem, to mingle our incense of gratitude with their chorus of praise!

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FOURTH SERIES.]

[No. 9.

THE

# EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,  
BOSTON.

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## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

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### PREFATORY NOTE.

[The following was originally published in 1820, with the title, "Letter from a Congregationalist to a Friend on the Subject of joining the New Episcopal Church." It was shortly after the consecration of St. Paul's Church in Boston, and had reference to the proselyting attempts in connection with that Society.

Portions of the article which were local and temporary have been omitted in the present republication.]

I HAVE duly received your note of the 24th inst. You inform me therein, that you have been solicited on various occasions, and with great urgency, to take a pew in the new Episcopal Church, just consecrated, in Common Street; and you request my opinion as to what course you ought to pursue. I hope it is not altogether flattery, when you tell me you do this in a reliance on my liberality; and I am sure that I am not too confident in hoping that you will make candid but due allowance, for the prejudices in which you know me to have been brought up, and under the influence of which I must, of course, speak to you. I am not ashamed of these congregational prejudices; for, like some other prejudices, they seem to be

nearly allied to virtues. It was by the spirit of congregationalism, that the first impulse was given, that ended in the settlement of our native land. It was that Church whose forms you are now solicited to adopt, which tyrannically ejected our ancestors from their pulpits and churches in England; and when I think of the two thousand faithful ministers of Christ, who were driven out from their charges in one day by the haughty English prelacy, I feel as if it were almost a part of national and patriotic duty not to look upon the question between the religious institutions of our ancestors, and those of the hierarchy which oppressed, ejected, and exiled them, as one of pure indifference.

You repeat to me in a hasty manner the arguments which you say have been addressed to you to induce you to leave the church in which you were baptized, of which you are a professing member, and where you have dedicated your children to the Christian faith. These arguments are some of them purely *ad captandum*, thrown in, I suppose, as slight make-weights to turn an almost wavering scale. I shall not, therefore, think it necessary to say any thing upon the comparative choice of a place for Christian worship, between a stone building in Grecian taste and a brick building in no taste at all. On the contrary, I rejoice as much as any one in the zeal displayed in the erection, at great expense, of an edifice in considerably better taste than any that our town can boast. It diminishes but little my satisfaction, that it is Grecian without and Roman within; and that, in constructing the portico of six columns instead of four, the architect has departed, not only from the model of the edifice which he professed to take for his guide, the little temple on the Ilissus, but has violated, I am told, the express canon of classic antiquity, which prescribes four columns to a por-



tico. I throw this out, not from any wish to do injustice to the style in which the new church is executed, which is certainly beautiful, but merely as a sort of offset to the appeal which has been made to our fashionable community, whom I have known in other instances besides yours to have been urged to join the Episcopal Church, upon the score of its being "the only one in town in which *a man of taste* could worship."

For the same reason, I shall say but little of another appeal which you tell me has been pressed on you; viz., that the father of your wife was an Episcopalian. I respect no prejudices more than filial ones, and should be grieved to say any thing which might seem disrespectful to the honored memory of Mrs. ——'s late father. But I suppose I may, without offence, call on you to remember, that, if your wife's father was an Episcopalian, your own father was not. Since you cannot well worship in two places, it would perhaps be as decent, and as conformable to domestic order, that your wife should continue to go with you to the church where she has already held up her children to be baptized, as that you should leave that church, for the sake of following her to a different form of worship, in which her father was educated. Were this a mere matter of conjugal courtesy, I would not be stiff about it. If you are willing to be reckoned with those who consider going to church as going to a fashionable exchange, or to a place of entertainment for a weary leisure day, why then it little matters where you go, or where you do not go; and, instead of submitting to the fatigue and wearisomeness of sitting an hour and a half or two hours in any church, you might attain the same end, and approve your courtesy as effectually to your wife, by taking her down to Nahant, or up to Fresh Pond. The subject, I confess, is too serious for this reply: it is the

arguments made use of which I ridicule. Let me add, moreover, that, if your wife's father was an Episcopalian, her grandfather was a Congregationalist, a stanch pillar of the Church of our forefathers, whose sacred rest it would go near to disturb, to hear that his descendants in the second generation were going over to the English Church.

Let me not be thought to speak slightly of a wife's scruples. Wherever the case occurs, that a wife conscientiously and unaffectedly believes and approves the doctrines or worship of the Episcopal or any other church, while her husband as conscientiously adheres to those of another, if she have not freedom of spirit to obey the Scripture command, to submit *herself to her husband as to the Lord*, then let them worship, each in their own church and their own way; but do not, on any account or from any consideration, be led to think that so solemn a thing as religious worship is to be made a subject of good-natured compliance and courtesy.

And here, before I proceed to communicate to you those important grounds upon which I think your opinion ought to be made up, I will observe, that there seems to me a gross impropriety in the common language made use of on these occasions. To leave a Congregational and go to an Episcopal church is called changing your *place* of worship; as if it were the *place* only which is changed, while the *worship* remains the same. This would be a language proper to be used of any one who should emigrate from the Park-street or the Essex-street Church to that in Common Street, as the articles of the Episcopal Church are known to be so Calvinistic (though *honestly* constructed with a design of being comprehensive enough to bring both orthodox and heretic within the fold) as to have induced some serious persons of Orthodox faith to join the Episcopal churches. But to those who have not

previously been imbued with Orthodox doctrines, it is not changing the *place* of worship to desert our Congregational churches for the Episcopal ones, it is changing the worship itself. It is going to a place where there is a different *object* of worship. It is leaving a church where God the Father is worshipped, to go to one where God the Son and God the Holy Ghost are worshipped with him. It is leaving a church where worship is paid to the one living and true God, as one person, to attend a church where it is taught that this one God is to be worshipped in three persons; and it is, finally, quitting a church where the form of the service puts it in the power of minister and people *to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, and avail themselves of the immense stores of sacred literature which have been opened in the last generation for the better understanding of the Scriptures, to go to a church built on the popish principle of infallibility, and tied down to a form of worship which has the certain effect of binding the consciences of one age in the chains of another. It is not my intention to enter into doctrinal discussions at this time. I shall not say a word against the doctrine of the Trinity, or any other doctrine contained in the articles of the Episcopal Church, any further than to allude to their existence in those articles. On the contrary, I have candor enough to rejoice, that, in our large and increasing town, there is a new church erected, where those who believe in its doctrines can conscientiously, with edification, and conveniently, assemble and worship. So far from moving any discussion against the doctrines of the Church, Unitarian though I be, I would say that in this very point is to be found the solution of the question you propose to me. If you believe the doctrines and approve the ritual of the Church, in God's name join yourself to it. You ought to



go there. You will be edified there. I am not a believer in the Trinity, but many men, better, I hope, than I, are believers of it; let them go to a church where they will be taught to say, "O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us miserable sinners." It is for persons who believe and feel this to go to a church where it is a part of the prescribed service; nor can I sufficiently express my surprise to you, that it ever could have become a question, whether anybody who did *not* believe it could or ought to join the Episcopal Church. I did not know that the most solemn act in which man can engage—the worship of God—was the subject for accommodation and compliance. I did not know, that, while kneeling down at the altar, with the most awful addresses which language can form on your lips, it was permitted to indulge in reservations which, even between man and man in the intercourse of life, would not be thought creditable. Many Orthodox I knew there must ever be, who could not reconcile to their notions of simple and scriptural worship the repetitions and ceremonies of the Episcopal ritual; but while I knew that all Trinitarians could *not* attend an Episcopal church, it was new to me that any Unitarians could. I was not prepared to see fashion, example, persuasion, and courtesy go to such length, and carry Christians to an altar where they cannot take their hearts and their consciences with them.

I proceed now to consider particularly some of the arguments by which you may be induced to join the Church.

1st. That you are fond of a *form of prayer*. I am fond of it also; but I do not join the Episcopal Church, because I like a *substance* of prayer better. I am amazed to hear intelligent Christians express so little regard for the faith they profess, as, because they prefer a *form* of



prayer, to attend a worship where they do not acknowledge the *object prayed to*. Such persons do well to say that they like "a form of prayer." A form indeed they do like, and a form only, else they would not, as Unitarians, like a Trinitarian form: they would not think they could worship God acceptably, where their consciences cried out against the form in which their prayers are clothed.

Though I would find no fault with any person who believed the doctrines of the Episcopal Church for being attached to the form in which the worship is conducted, according to the Book of Common-Prayer, yet there are, notwithstanding, many and great objections to that ritual, independent of its doctrines, which have deterred and always will deter even Trinitarians who have a taste for a scriptural simplicity in divine service. These objections are not modern objections, they are not Unitarian objections, they are not objections now devised in the spirit of local opposition. I could give them to you in the words of Calamy and Baxter, and the other Presbyterian commissioners named by the king in 1661, with some of the highest dignitaries of the Church of England, for the revision of the Book of Common-Prayer. The limits of this letter will not allow me to give these objections; but I will send you the work, that you may read it at large.

It is a well-known saying of Lord Chatham, that the Church of England hath "a Popish liturgy, a Calvinistic creed, and an Arminian clergy." A Popish liturgy and Calvinistic articles she has in this country, as well as in England: how far St. Paul's Church will or will not justify the addition of an "Arminian clergy," I am not informed.

I said above, that I, too, was fond of a form of prayer. But, in order to prevent it from overlaying and stifling the substance, there should be an edifying choice and variety;

and, instead of a poor and monotonous ceremonial to be run through "Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays" throughout the year, and every year, there should be such a succession of services as would prevent a frequent recurrence of any one, and which would advantageously take the place of the garbled extracts from the Gospels and Epistles, of the short and unmeaning collects, and, above all, the antiquated version of the Psalms, which now fill up the Book of Common-Prayer. This last portion of the Prayer-book is particularly obnoxious; and a volume might be written to point out the gross absurdities of putting, Sunday after Sunday, into the mouths of the worshippers, men, women, and children, petitions which were applicable only to the individual circumstances of David or Solomon. As one example is better than a thousand assertions, I shall here trouble you with one or two taken on opening the Church Psalter at hazard. Whenever Sunday falls on the 22d of the month, all the congregation, priest and people, warden and clerk, man, woman, and child, are obliged, under the name of evening prayer, to repeat such an injudicious and unedifying selection from the Psalms as this: "Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine, Ephraim also is the strength of my head, Juda is my law-giver, *Moab is my washpot, over Edom will I cast out my shoe.*" Not content with this specimen of *evening prayer*, and having called on the worshippers to say that Moab is his washpot, and over Edom he will cast out his shoe, he is obliged, in the same evening prayer, to remember his enemies in the following Christian style:—

"Let his days be few, and let another take his office.

"Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

"Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread; let them seek it also out of desolate places.

"Let the extortioner consume all that he hath, and let the stranger spoil his labor.

“Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion on his fatherless children.”

This is evening prayer for Christians; and what originally was written by David in the bitterness of personal provocation, and under the influence of those imperfect views of religious duty which the preparatory dispensation inspired, is kept up as a part of Christian service to be repeated for ever by persons who ought to be taught by their Master to *bless those who curse them*.

Finally, were it nothing but an attachment to a form of prayer, which carries many, against the dictates of their consciences, and their persuasion of religious truth, to the Episcopal Church, one would think that they would in preference have joined themselves to King's Chapel. They would there have enjoyed the advantage of the form,—of the Episcopal form as purged of its doctrinal peculiarities by the successive labors of the distinguished Dr. Samuel Clarke, and the Rev. Drs. Lindsey and Disney. It is true, this form of worship is intended to meet the consciences of those who wish for a purely Unitarian worship; but there is nothing in it exclusively Unitarian, and nothing offensive to an Arian, or even to a Trinitarian, except by omission. It answers in this to what was recommended by the royal Presbyterian commissioners in 1661, who, Orthodox as they were, still had the liberality to make use of the following language: “In pursuance of His Majesty's most gracious commission, for the satisfaction of tender consciences, and the procuring of peace and unity among ourselves, we judge mete to propose,—

“First, that all the prayers and other materials of the liturgy may consist of nothing *doubtful or questioned* among pious, learned, and orthodox persons, inasmuch as the professed end of composing them is for the declaring of the unity and consent of all who join in the public worship.”



Considering this to have been written by such men as Baxter and Calamy, in 1661, methinks it might give a lesson to us in 1820. But here is the very mischief of written and prescribed forms, that they are a conspiracy against the progress of light and knowledge; and, seizing upon the human intellect and the power of understanding divine truth, at some one stage of its progress, commonly at a low and imperfect stage, they condemn it to rest there, and say to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further."

I shall allude to but one more objection to a form of prayer, which is this, that, besides unfitting the clergy for the performance of an extemporaneous religious service whenever occasion requires it, it leads to indifference in all the religious exercises, to the degree that Episcopalian preaching, both in England and America, is notoriously poor. The reason is obvious. One great part of the service is written, and the mind is never wrought up to the duty of devotional preparation. Again, the space which the form of prayer occupies in the services of the sanctuary throws the sermon into the shade; and it is common enough to hear Episcopalians so blinded to the defects of their form of worship, as even to mention it as an advantage, that *the preaching* is of little consequence.

The preaching of God's word of little consequence! The only engine by which the reformation in religion was brought about, the only means of keeping up any tolerable measure of religious light among the people! It was by excluding preaching almost wholly from the churches that the Papists succeeded in enslaving the world; and, just in proportion as this main part of religious duty is neglected and undervalued, will religion sink into superstition.

I need not ask not to be mistaken here. No man can be farther than I from wishing to have the services of the



sanctuaries grow into a mere literary exercise, an exhibition of preaching, a show of fine paragraphs. This is odious, heathenish, wicked; and it is said, unjustly I think, to be the sin of our Congregational churches at the present day. I have thought that this was injuriously charged on our churches, and that those who wished to find or make an apology for cold, sleepy preaching, on the part of themselves or their ministers thought proper to stigmatize a warmer and more impassioned manner as artificial. At any rate, with all the abhorrence I feel of art, I shall find but little fault with those arts in a Christian preacher which enchain the attention and command the sympathy of his audience. But let not our Episcopalian brethren, while they boast of their exemption, as we think they safely may, from this sort of preaching, do not let them forget, that the fastidiousness of literary taste still creeps in, and craves indulgence among them. A good, clear voice and a distinct enunciation are a fortune in the Episcopal Church. A man can *read himself* into the best parishes of their communion; and, much as I like good reading, I must think, that, either in point of taste or edification, fine reading is a little lower, to say the least, in the scale, than fine preaching.

It is more than time to state to you my impressions of the value of another argument, which you say has been urged on you to induce you to join the new church; viz., that, by so doing, you escape from religious controversy which, whether you attend the Orthodox or the Liberal churches in Boston, is sure to be your portion. I have heard this argument mentioned by others as well as yourself; and I shall therefore give it a fair, though brief, consideration.

In the first place, it seems to me to assume a fact of which I was not aware, and which I still doubt to exist in a very oppressive degree.

But, independent of all this, the idea of escaping from religious controversy by attending a Trinitarian church is much like the argument used on some occasion in favor of the slave-trade, and to which Bishop Warburton, who alludes to the argument, gives an admirable reply, that serves also with perfect pertinency in the present case. "What," says the bishop (I quote from memory), "you tell us that the West-India slavery is better than the African barbarism, where the savage princes are at liberty to hunt the poor negroes, whom they take and sell. A great advantage, truly, to exchange the liberty of being hunted for the liberty of being caught." And a great escape, indeed, for a quiet conscience, to leave a church where certain difficult doctrines are controverted, to go to one where these same doctrines must perforce be avowed! A great escape, indeed, for one who will not have his religious affections disturbed by doubtful disputations on the Trinity, to go to a church where he must do, what I believe is never done even in our most Orthodox Congregational churches, pray to the Trinity by name! And this is the escape from controversy which Episcopalianism offers to the Unitarian who does not like to have doctrinal points agitated! and which seems to me literally, in the words of Bishop Warburton, exchanging the liberty of being hunted for the liberty of being caught.

So far from the Episcopal Church affording any relief to quiet consciences, who wish to leave out of sight the doctrinal questions, it is an undoubted truth, that, in no churches in our country are doctrines so obtruded into the worship. I have attended Orthodox Presbyterian worship as often as usually falls to the lot of a Unitarian, and I do not remember ever to have heard a prayer addressed explicitly to the Trinity; and it is only of late years, that the triune ascription, as it is called, has become general.

Nothing is so rare, even in the services of the most zealous Trinitarians, as to hear prayers separately addressed to God the Son, nor can I recollect ever to have heard a prayer addressed to God the Holy Ghost, all of which are to be found in the Episcopal ritual. Our Orthodox Congregational brethren, faithful to their assertion, that, though they believe in three persons, they worship but one God, dwell almost entirely on the unity, to the exclusion of the plurality; and in so doing practise a Christian and laudable tenderness for the understandings of their hearers, confessedly inadequate to grasp this mystery. I have been told by a clerical friend, that this is still more strikingly the case in Scotland, the praise of whose orthodoxy is in all the churches. He tells me that in a considerable town in Scotland, and in a free attendance on all sorts of worship, he never heard any thing from an Orthodox minister there from which the doctrine of the Trinity could be deduced by any thing but implication. It was not for want of believing it; there was not, perhaps, one of them who would not, if occasion called, have lifted up his voice in its defence; but they feel, what every man must feel, that, if it be true, it is too mysterious and unintelligible to be an eligible subject of repetition in a Christian assembly: and I confess it disgusts me to hear a doctrine from which one part of the Christian community revolts as unscriptural, and the great majority almost wholly abstains as unedifying, obtruded some number of times into every morning and evening service of the Episcopal Church.

You will by this time, my dear friend, feel possessed of my opinions on the subject of joining the new church. Briefly to recapitulate them, they are these:—

1. That no person can, with propriety, worship in an Episcopal church, who does not believe in the doctrines contained in its articles, and involved in its ritual.

2. That, even to those who have no doctrinal objections, the ritual has great imperfections.

3. That the expected refuge from controversy desired by tender consciences is in nowise to be found in the Episcopal Church.

Should you ask my permission to make this letter public for the sake of assisting others to whom the same application may be made as to yourself, I shall not object. There may be a little odium attached to this kind of interference, but I trust it will not be forgotten that all rights are not on one side. Some zeal and activity have been displayed in building up the new church; and, if I have not been misinformed, the new flock is, in some measure, expected to be gathered by lambs called over from other folds. I presume not to call in question, nor even curiously to sift, the means which have been employed on this occasion; but I hope, that, while the gentlemen concerned in the new church maintain their right to enlist recruits wherever they can get them, they will not wholly forget that others have a corresponding right.



FOURTH SERIES.]

[No. 6.]

# BAPTISM.

BY

REV. L. J. LIVERMORE.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BOSTON.

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

# BAPTISM.

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BY REV. L. J. LIVERMORE.

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THE purpose of this article is to state, in a very summary form, what we suppose to be the prevailing views among us on the subject of Baptism; touching only on the leading points of evidence sufficiently to make clear the nature of our faith.

The practice of baptism, as a symbol of moral purpose and religious conviction, is supposed to have originated from the use of water in bathing, and as a means of ceremonial cleanness. It is believed to have been customary to baptize converts to Judaism, as one step in their initiation into the privileges of the Jewish Church. That it was a rite already in use among the Jews, and with a somewhat definite religious signification, appears from the way in which John is said to have come baptizing, without any thing to intimate or suggest that it was a novelty originated by him. The same is also indicated by Christ's words to Nicodemus, in John, third chapter, fifth verse; for, if Nicodemus had not already been used to this form, such an answer would not have been intelligible to him. Christ alludes to the rite as something his hearer would understand. Baptism was a symbol peculiarly intelligible and

expressive to the people of a warm climate, where water was comparatively scarce, and its use indispensable almost equally for health and comfort.

When John came preaching in the remoter country regions of Judea, — conscious of a religious inspiration and mission, and looking for the speedy appearing of the Redeemer, — he found this symbol of moral and religious renewal already familiar to the people. It was well adapted to give point and permanence to the religious feelings he awakened. It defined the nature and purpose of his call to them, in a clearer and more effective way than verbal statements alone could do it. John's baptism is sometimes spoken of as the baptism of or to repentance; but this does not carry the inference that the symbolic meaning of the rite, as he used it, was penitence. The symbol had reference to the purer life which was to follow. It was not a confession of past sins, but a pledge of future piety and righteousness. Only as such could Jesus have received the rite. It was in him the formal recognition of John's right to preach of the truth which he proclaimed, and a type of his own consecration to a holy life. For others, it was a baptism of repentance, because the sinful can only come to righteousness through repentance. Reformation is to them the condition of subsequent holiness of life. John's baptism was also called the baptism of repentance, because he enjoined this as the means of grace; while Christian baptism was associated with higher views of the divine presence and help.

The same reasons which made this rite suitable for John's purposes commended it to Jesus. Almost as soon as he began to have disciples, the disciples began to baptize. There is no reason to doubt this baptism was in the name of Jesus; that is, it implied a receiving of him so far as his work was then manifest. When the Lord's earthly



task was completed, he left this to his disciples as the plainest outward sign of faith in him. Its meaning to the Christian convert lay not in any implied confession of past sins, or any supposed power in the rite to make him clean. It was his formal reception of a new teacher, and a new life,—a life of moral purity and of religious consecration. By receiving baptism in the name of Jesus, he signified that the purer life to which he pledged himself was made to appear to him his duty through the teachings of Christ; that he believed in Jesus as one sent from God, as his Lord and Master; and, because believing so, that he took on himself the duty of living according to the commands of Jesus. The ordinance carried with itself a meaning varying according to each convert's measure of Christian faith and understanding. It stood for his pledge of faith and duty, and was equally the symbol of his participation in the grace and privileges of the gospel.

Baptism came to be an ordinance of the Christian Church, not because of any essential value in itself,—not because Jesus Christ saw in it, of itself, any spiritual value,—but as a form or symbol, the meaning of which was already familiar to those around him, and therefore well adapted to serve as an expressive, intelligible, and visible sign and confession of faith in him as the Teacher and Redeemer of men. There is no proof that Jesus regarded the rite as an indispensable condition of salvation, or of a Christian faith and standing. The words already referred to, spoken to Nicodemus, are most reasonably explained, not as enforcing a double necessity of baptism and of spiritual regeneration, but one necessity,—the moral and religious birth, of which the washing of water was the recognized symbol and the spirit of God the efficient cause, in opposition to the Jewish trust in natural descent from Abraham. Any thing so contrary to the general tenor of Christ's teaching as

the absolute necessity of an outward and ritual observance can be received only on the authority of an express declaration. There is no such express declaration of the indispensableness of baptism. If Paul had regarded this rite as the invariable and necessary condition of a Christian position and salvation, expressly enjoined and instituted by the Lord, he could not have said, "Christ sent me not to baptize." His way of speaking of it shows that he looked on it as a thing of subordinate importance, — as a sign, which, being in use and well understood, and approved by the Lord, should be observed, but to be carefully restrained to its proper use as a symbol only; that he avoided any views that seemed to attribute to it any efficacy other than as a sign and pledge of a new and better life after it.

With regard to the method of baptism, there is nothing to prove that the form was considered material, — nothing to make it certain that any one form was exclusively used. It is not improbable that it was often by immersion. Habits and conditions peculiar to that age and climate made this a far less inconvenient and otherwise objectionable form than in our time and situation. Several recorded instances of baptism are such as most naturally to be understood of some other method than immersion, — as that of Paul, just rising from a long season of prostration and fasting; that of the jailer's family; and perhaps that of the great multitude added to the Church at Pentecost. But, whatever the practice was at that time, it is contrary to the essential nature of the gospel to suppose any religious importance to be in a precise imitation. No Church in the world, it is probable, observes the Lord's Supper in precisely the same way that it was first observed. Yet Christians do not any the less believe that they are obeying the precept of the Master. The idea is the essential thing.

“The flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you are spirit and are life.” So baptism, being a symbol, may, with obvious propriety, vary to suit the physical circumstances of person and place. In some cases, it is obviously impracticable to administer the rite by immersion. It cannot be thought that Christ meant to make spiritual ends depend on uncertain material conditions. We believe it is actually following Christ, to assert our freedom from an unvarying rule of form, while we aim to preserve the moral and spiritual significance.

With regard to the baptism of children in infancy, we hold that the New Testament does not give any explicit information. The words in Acts viii. 16, taken in connection with what immediately precedes, and interpreted in the light of what is well known to have been the custom of the Jews, create a strong presumption that children were baptized then and there by the apostle, or under his immediate direction. The words of ver. 16 are most obviously explained as a reason for the precept of the preceding verse, and as intended to meet a doubt, which some might feel, whether Christian baptism was meant for children as well as adults. The several instances where households are said to have been baptized, as if following the lead and example of the head of the family, strengthen the presumption. Moreover, this has been the practice of the Church from the earliest times of which we have record. The first fathers allude to the custom, as that which was in general use, and derived from the traditions of the apostles. They discuss questions as to time and other conditions, but not as to the fitness of the custom itself. We favor this practice also on grounds of reason, which are good in the absence of express precept to the contrary, as significant of the divinely ordained connection between the life of the parent and that of the children; and symbolic of the gen-



eral law, that children of faithful Christian parents grow up believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We do not regard the baptism of the young as a completed thing, until, being brought up in the knowledge of God and the Saviour, and having attained to the power of acting and judging for themselves, they openly and freely adopt the act of their parents as their own. The significance of infant baptism depends much on our faith in the Church as the organic and perpetually renewed body of Christ, — one, though ever changing, — and resting on the divinely appointed continuity of human life. The children of Christian parents are born into the Church of Christ. They are the Lord's. Baptism does not make the bond. It declares it, and pledges the parent to fidelity in his efforts to make it a lasting and complete union by the Christian nurture and instruction of his offspring.

We regard baptism as only a symbol, in itself of no effect, as signing the pledge is in the case of one who abandons the use of alcohol. This symbol is of higher respect than any other, as having come to us through ages of Christian observance, as pertaining to the most momentous interests and duties, and as sanctioned by the example and authority of the Head of the Church. It is not formality to adhere to it, there being no objection to it, when it is held free from superstitious notions, either as to its efficacy or its form; and, on the other hand, there being many good reasons for continuing it. Those rather are formalists, who, like the Quakers, make a *point*, and therefore a *form*, of rejecting all forms. It is the only visible mark of the unity of the Church, — one Lord, one baptism. It is a plain, easy, intelligible way of performing a universal duty, that of openly confessing faith in Christ; an equally intelligible sign of the pure and righteous life to which the Christian pledges himself. Coming to us from Christ, and



administered in his name, it is a means of expressing, and therefore a means of strengthening, the sense of our union with him. It continues and visibly expresses the unity of the Church as the fellowship of believers in one Saviour, believers in God the Father through Christ the Son. We offer and urge it on the unbaptized, not as an avowal of holiness attained, or a saving change already wrought, but, after the apostles' custom, as a simple act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Teacher and Redeemer; the law of our higher and better life, when life in its strength is ours; and the ground of a hope triumphant over sickness and the fear of death.

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It is common to represent Jesus as leaving the infinite serenity in which he dwelt, and, moved with a Divine compassion, taking upon himself the form of man and the varied endurance of life, that so he might bring man out of sin. That may be good poetry, but it is not good truth. On the other hand, I do not think that the bald idea of Jesus as one "sent," though a nearer, is quite the whole, truth. It is so that he speaks of himself, and so that his disciples speak of him. But there was a certain *voluntariness* about his mission which we lose sight of when we regard him as simply the follower of an inexorable law, and only coming to man's help because he was "sent." I cannot fathom Divine council, and determine by what election or selection Jesus was commissioned; but this I feel, that the commission, the appointment, did not alone constitute him the Messiah. He did not come as a king's messenger comes, as an envoy of an empire, solely at command. There was a deliberate and conscious acceptance of the office; and this, not in the mere boy-resolve of the Temple, or the secret struggle and purpose of the desert, not by baptism in the Jordan, but by going out into life

and carrying the spirit of self-sacrifice into every thing, — else “he had not been a man in God’s idea of manhood; for the idea of man which God had been for ages laboring to give, through a consecrated tribe and a consecrated nation, was the idea of a being whose life-law is *sacrifice*, every act and every thought being devoted to God.” His whole life was proof of his declaration, “I sanctify myself.” To have been merely *sent* made him a servant, at best a later Moses; but to *accept* the mission made him a son, — Jesus, the Christ.

Every man is “sent” into the world; but not till he consciously, deliberately, accepts his mission can he become lifted up into the great heirship with Christ: not till then is he a “son.” The act of sending, on the part of God, must be supplemented by the act of acceptance on the part of man. The acceptance must be without reserve. Not only must he take God’s gift of life, but he must give life to duty; not merely must he surrender himself to the Divine will, which is compulsion, but he must consecrate himself to the Divine love, which is choice. This is the complement to God’s act, without which it cannot be complete. It makes no odds what other consecrating there may have been, what setting apart of parent or of church, what dropping of water, what imposition of hands, what repeating of catechism, what signing of creed: it is all formal and valueless until the man have set himself apart in solemn, secret self-dedication. Balaam and Jonah and many another have been appointed to great duties, have been solemnly put aside for special work, yet have utterly failed to do it, because there was no inward consecrating, seconding and sealing that of God or man. The descending of the spirit upon Jesus, or any other appointing of God, had availed nothing to make him the world’s Redeemer, had he not consecrated himself. It was the spirit in him, meeting, co-



operating, blending with the spirit from on high, that gave him the power to become Son of God: it is that in us which shall lift us to be sons.

Self-consecration, the giving of one's self up to the service of God, is a grand, decisive, voluntary act of the soul, striking at the root of all worldliness and selfishness, and accepting without reserve whatever God may order to be done or to be borne. It is the putting side by side what the world has to offer and what God has to offer, the striking the balance between the two, and the unreserved acceptance of the offer of God. It is the conscious and free acceptance of the high destiny God lays before his children; the resolve to dedicate wholly body and mind and heart as a reasonable, holy, and acceptable sacrifice. It is the entrance into the spirit of Jesus, and the carrying of that spirit out into all the details of life, in devotedness to man and devotion to God. It is the full *at-one-ing* of the two wills, the reach of the spirit in man after the spirit of God, the approach of the finite toward the Infinite,—the soul's eternal task and grandest privilege. It is not an act of the will alone, one single, great resolve,—the vision of the Mount,—the luxurious, beatific attitude of faith and hope and longing into which secret prayer and thought sometimes throw us, when we taste angels' food, and feel as if the kingdoms of the world were already at our feet; not the transfiguration, but the after duty, the coming in cooler blood down amid the things of earth, the meeting and casting out of the kind that only goes out by the spirit's fast and prayer. The true law of every life, the only law of life, is consecration; and "consecration is not wrapping one's self in a holy web in the sanctuary, and then coming forth after prayer and meditation, and saying, 'There, I am consecrated.' Consecration is going out into the world where God Almighty is, and using every power

to his glory. It is simply dedicating one's life, its whole flow, to his service."

The failure of man so largely in the true life is because he will not comprehend what an *utter* thing consecration is, and how *utterly* impossible the kingdom is without it. The difference between a man who has consecrated himself, and the man who has made up his mind that on the whole it is better for him to lead a correct life, is as the difference between fiction and fact. Nothing can turn the man consecrate. Like Paul, he counts all loss gain; and the catalogue of pains and penalties is but his inspiration. What would deter others stimulates him: what would dismay, confirms. No high endeavor, no grand result, comes otherwise. It is the man rising to his native height, doing all things through the Christ strengthening him; the man no way lukewarm, but kindling with, possessed by, "the enthusiasm of humanity," and so treading down all intervening obstacles, till, more than conqueror, he wins "that crown with peerless glories bright."

I know just what every one says down in his heart as he reads this. I know how we shrink from such deliberate surrender of ourselves, our *all*, to God's law; and I know how utterly life fails of its grandeur, how it loses the promise in this, and its hope in the life to come, because this *one absolutely necessary thing* we will not do. We are willing enough to serve God, if we can only make our own reservations. Rebels so gladly take the oath of allegiance. But it is the reservation that kills the quality of the loyalty: it is the reservation that makes of us, not followers of God, as dear children, but timid and time-serving and unreliable slaves,—in the thing easy, the thing convenient, the thing in which we see immediate reward or penalty, obedient; but when the pressure comes, and the whole man is called on, when a cross is to be borne, hesitating;

half faithful, or recreant. There are times of tribulation in every human experience, often unrecognized by other men,—things in our inner secret lives, as well as of our outward and visible,—when nothing can stand but the soul which is *all* God's; there are times when men terribly fail, when the disaster of their moral overthrow is broad and deep. It is only the old story. The house is built upon the sand. The life is not riveted into the core of the rock. There has been some reserve in the consecration,—a secret flaw, which at the test-moment betrays itself, and wrecks the man.

We do not want to be at the mercy of flaws. In the metal thoroughly welded they need not be. Make self-consecration thorough, and the gates of hell cannot prevail.

How am I to make self-consecration thorough,—how get my grapple in the heart of the rock,—how secure myself against flaw?

1. By making your consecration *complete*; by reserving nothing to yourself; by giving all to God. 'The curse of the soul is its habit of *halfness*. Life everywhere bears melancholy witness to the fact. In the things of the higher life, it is specially disastrous. Whose conscience does not condemn him? Who does not shamefully halt at the very crisis-point,—retreat at the moment that he should charge? Who has not again and again turned abruptly from his prayers, his resolves, his hopes, his only relief a panic cry, "God have mercy!" as there starts in his soul the conviction that after all it is only half service that he offers; that there is behind another, blacker half, stubbornly refusing to be surrendered? What sighings, what upbraidings, what conscience-frights, at these too frequent revealings! and then what a lapse again into the old way, into the death-bondage! Man's soul must be in daily peril, unsafe in its safest hour, so long as he cannot yield this other half, so



long as he will not make consecration a thing in every way complete. Sin must be master so long as man shall be renegade. The whole man-power is not out, in use, the whole power to do, the whole power to resist, and so there is ever this wretched failure, nursing ever the deadly, growing skepticism as to man's ability to be what God demands and Christ enjoins. Man's infidelity neutralizes Christ's example, and thwarts the Divine purpose; and the second coming of the Saviour in the renewed life of his disciples is hardly more than a far-off dream of a few waiting Simeons and Annas.

2. And, next, consecration must not be mere resolve. The most obstinately resolved is not self-consecrated. In mere resolve, we have only the human elements. The Divine partner is omitted, — that Being whose silent, special partnership is the real capital in the enterprise. When the unjust steward says, "I am resolved what to do," there is no quickening sympathy in us. We are not roused. It is a man's word: there is no God in it. But when the Christ says, "I sanctify myself," or Paul declares, "This one thing I do," you find yourself unconsciously aglow, and a kindred spirit in you, and you know that they will do until the end; and you feel that your doing lies that way. The resolved man is the man alone: the consecrated man is the man with God.

3. Self-consecration is not a single act, or fact in the past, — a definite thing to be referred back to; it is not an act, an impulse, an emotion, a sentiment, but a principle brought and laid upon the altar of service, to be constantly re-placed, re-sanctified, as the show-bread of the table before the altar. It was this perpetual renewal of the early vow that made Jesus the all-conqueror; not in Nazareth, not in the Temple, not at the Jordan, not in the Wilderness only was his consecrating, but in every deed of love, in



every word of truth, in every mountain prayer, in every midnight vigil, in every buffet of man, and every travail of his soul. Renewedly dedicated was he, not by any new Divine outpouring, but by ever-new outgoing of his spirit toward the Infinite, and ever-helping love.

4. Nor is it merely the consecration of ourselves that is needed, — our hearts, our thoughts, our principles; but the consecration of what is ours, the results of gifts God has made us in the beginning, the using of his talents. The man of intellect should consecrate his brain to God, and, dying, be able to say that there is no line he could wish to blot, no sentiment he could desire to suppress; the man of ingenuity should consecrate his gift, and let the cunning of his hand labor nowhere that it will not bless man or help God. The artist, the discoverer, the man of science, and every greater or humbler man, is bound to use his ability as a Divine trust, and see that it glorify not himself, but God; and he who has money and makes money is bound, with no niggardly dole, to give it freely out to God's service, — not to hug it or to squander it, but to remember that it is the *only gift of God of which he cannot take something away*; that it is the gift of God by which he can do much good; and that it is the mean avarice and hoarding of it, the stingy, selfish neglect to use it for man and for God, which constitutes a crime Jesus more frequently and terribly rebuked, to which he awarded more fearful punishment, than all others. Take down your Bibles, and read the Gospels through with that one thought, and see how much and how perpetual is his demand of money, and what a doom he promises the man who will not be rich toward God; and then go into life, having not merely set apart, but *consecrated*, some new portion of your increase — God's money — to the good of some fellow-man, some needy cause, some social good, to some great eternal

principle of truth, justice, liberty, right. Make a habit of so consecrating the returns of every ability, that in the end yours may be the hopeful, cheerful answer, "Lo! there thou hast thine own with usury."

It is useless to talk, and deny the power of the human soul to do any thing God asks of it. It is no harsh, selfish task set us for his own glory; but to our fidelity it will approve itself as a staff of support and a reward of joy. It will ever bring comfort and power. I have somewhere met a thought like this, the truth of which all will recognize, — there is in us all, and native to us, an element of self-sacrifice. It pulses through the imagination of our youth; it is the spur of maturer love. Where we love we desire to give, not outward gifts merely, but *self*, — that which specially is ours, *ourselves*. There is none so selfish but in some sphere desires to give up self, and succeeds. The element out of which self-consecration grows is, then, not merely a thing possible, — an acquisition; but an endowment, — native. That consecration of self is possible in lower things, the long, patient devotedness in sickness proves, the grand heroism of the last past years attests. Is there not something deeper and better in us, something of more worth, something in which we may more desire to be spent, than love of friends, or loyalty to country? And is there not something of a grand help in the very thought and purpose of so serving God, which lifts half the difficulty, and should take away all the doubt? If it be a thing a man can do, — dare danger and death in the spirit of devotedness to country, can we not give life, the every energy we possess, the uttermost that we are, to Him, the all-loving and gracious? Indeed, there is no impossibility about it. The two things are similar in kind; they only differ in degree. Christ's life is only impossible where there is no Christ's spirit; and Christ's spirit is not the

gift to the great and wise, the few : it is not exceptional ; but God gives it without measure to the simple, who ask for it, who toil for it, who wait for it, who know it when it comes, and who accept and use it. He drops it into any heart which lies open to receive it, as he drops the dew into the lowliest flower whose upturned cup all day long has thirsted after, and patiently waited, the coming of the blessing.

There is a single way to do the will of God on earth, to render him the acceptable service. It is to consecrate, to religiously set apart and devote, ourselves to Him. And this consecration, as it was in Christ, is not one, but a series of acts, a constant renewal. The life of God in the soul is not a thing to be left to hazard, which may come in return to a little forethought and preparation. You cannot take it up under a spasm of emotion, and carry it out as a sentiment into life. Sentiment parches and shrivels in the first heat of the world, wilts and wastes before its sirocco breath. It must be a principle, a thing with a taproot running deep down into the interior consciousness, grappling with the foundations of life, and getting its success of that Holy Spirit whose presence and sustaining power is not absent from any, though it slumber in the many who will not rouse it into life.

To the work, then. " Rally the good in the depths of thyself." Bring the great offering, — the heart, the life. Lay it reverently, with a great purpose and a deep prayer, with unflinching faith and kindling hope, upon the altar of service. God will move before it and about it, and will accept it as he once accepted Abraham's sacrifice ; he will welcome it as he welcomed the Saviour's submission ; he will reward it with his best gift, — here peace, and hereafter bliss.



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My Father is greater than I. — JOHN XIV. 28.

THE question of THE SUPREME DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST will be my subject this evening. I shall reserve for the next lecture, an explicit statement of my own views with reference to our Saviour's personal rank and character and I shall now confine myself to the simple question: *Was Jesus of Nazareth identical with the Almighty Creator?*

Before entering upon my subject, suffer me to make one preliminary remark. There are two modes employed in proving doctrines from the Bible. One is the quotation of single texts, without reference to the context, or to the analogy of other portions of Scripture. The other is based upon the comparison of a text with its context, and of Scripture with Scripture; and has reference rather to the general tone and spirit of the sacred writings, or of particular books and passages, than to insulated words and phrases. The latter, I hardly need say, is the only true mode. By the former, any and every doctrine might be established; and its use has, in fact, led to most of the broad differences among Christians, and of the exceedingly wide departures from "the simplicity that is in Christ."

No book in the world could bear such rules and modes of interpretation, as have been applied to the Bible. In all books, except scientific treatises, free use is made of metaphor and hyperbole, which are always defined and limited by what goes before and what follows, but which, taken by themselves and explained literally, would imply the most puerile and absurd notions. Now the fashion among theologians has been, to set up the seeming signification of some three or four isolated clauses in the Bible, as overweighing the clear and acknowledged tenor of the entire Scriptures, as if the inspired writers could have failed to recognize constantly, and to state explicitly, any fundamental doctrine of the religion which they taught.

I can best illustrate the prevalent mode of Scriptural interpretation, by supposing a case. Suppose that, fifteen or twenty centuries hence, there should be remaining some two or three authentic biographies of Napoleon Bonaparte. Suppose that in one of these, written by an admiring Frenchman, it should be said of him: "He was a very God among his soldiers, — adoring millions prostrated themselves before him, — he took in the nations of the earth at a glance, — his will was omnipotent." Suppose that in another of these biographies, written by a bigoted English tory, it should be said of him: "He was a very fiend incarnate, — the prince of darkness never let loose upon earth a more fearful angel of destruction." Suppose that, though, elsewhere throughout these books, Napoleon was perpetually talked of as a man, and the books, taken as a whole, made utter nonsense upon the supposition that he was not a man, there yet should arise a set of critics, who maintained that Napoleon was a divine being, and another set, who maintained that he was a demon, — these two classes of critics would aptly represent the generality of modern theologians and biblical interpreters.



The true mode of interpretation obviously is, first, to get at the general tone and spirit of the book, or books, which we wish to interpret, and then, when we find a passage of difficult, doubtful, or ambiguous signification, to seek for it the interpretation, or to give it that one of several possible interpretations, which best accords with the tone and spirit of the whole. Thus, if the entire New Testament from beginning to end, if every discourse of our Saviour, if every exposition of Christian doctrine made by the apostles, if the whole tone of spiritual phraseology, declares, or necessarily implies, the inferiority of the Son to the Father, and yet there are some half-dozen or more single texts which seem to teach his supreme divinity, but admit of a different interpretation, I contend, that we are bound to interpret these texts in accordance with the voice of Scripture taken collectively; and I also maintain that, where there is any reasonable doubt with regard to the reading, or the punctuation of a passage, we are bound to prefer that reading, or that mode of punctuation, which best accords with the rest of the New Testament.

But let me not be misunderstood. I by no means say that half a dozen texts, or even a single text of Scripture, may not be sufficient to establish a religious doctrine. On the other hand, there are subjects spoken of but once or twice, on which I derive as definite and firm an opinion, from one or two texts, as I should from a volume. And if our Saviour were named but six times, or but once, in a series of books proffering the claims to plenary and conclusive authority, which, in my view, the New Testament proffers, and if, each of those six times, or that once, he were spoken of as the supreme God, I should then believe him to be the supreme God. But the case is very different. He speaks of himself, and is spoken of, many hundred times, in the New Testament. Take away some half-

dozen, or, at most, a very few of these texts, and no one will contend that there remains a single case, in which the phraseology does not necessarily imply inferiority to the eternal Father. These few texts, as I interpret them, imply no other doctrine. But yet my Trinitarian brethren contend that they teach our Saviour's supreme divinity. Admitting, for the moment, that such were their most obvious meaning, the question is, whether they ought to outweigh the hundreds of texts that teach a different doctrine. Christ cannot be both a self-existent and a created being, both God and the Son of God, both equal and inferior to the Father. And if he, many hundreds of times, calls himself, and is called by his authorized interpreters, a created being, the Son of God, and inferior to the Father, then it seems to me that the few texts, which might bear a different meaning, ought to be interpreted in accordance with these hundreds of texts. With this general statement of facts in the case, I presume that no Trinitarian would find fault. But the Trinitarian would maintain that the hundreds of texts ought to be interpreted by the few.

These things premised, I now proceed to exhibit the chief reasons, why I find myself constrained to regard our Saviour as a created and subordinate being.

In the first place, our Saviour never declares himself the supreme God, in any of the discourses or conversations recorded in the gospels. This is not a doctrine, for which it is common to appeal to our Saviour's own words; and yet, often as he spake of himself, and plain and confidential as was his intercourse with his disciples during the last scenes of his life, it hardly seems possible that he should have left them without a hint of his true nature and glory. I know of but two of his own sayings, which are ever quoted as referring to his supreme divinity; and I doubt whether these would be quoted in a serious argument.

One of these is, "I and my Father are one,"\* which he sufficiently explains, when he afterwards prays for his disciples, "that they may be one, even as we are one."† The other is, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father,"‡ which, in the next verse, he explains by saying: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?" I am astonished that this should ever have been regarded as a Trinitarian proof-text. I know not a more decidedly anti-Trinitarian text in the Bible. For, if there be three distinct persons in the God-head, seeing one of them is surely not seeing the other, — seeing the Father is not seeing the Son. But if, as Unitarians believe, Christ dwelt in God, and God in him, if Christ was the image, the representative of the Father, then he, who had seen him, had seen the Father, — he, who had been conversant with the image, had become acquainted with the attributes of the original.

If our Saviour were indeed the supreme God, a fact, no less striking and unaccountable than his own silence on the subject, is, that the apostles did not proclaim him as God in their preaching to the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. The cross, the ignominy, the lowly and suffering estate of Jesus, was the great stumbling-block to those among whom they preached; and it was, therefore, a prime object with them to extol and exalt him, to set forth his claims upon the reverence of man, and to exhibit his intrinsic greatness and excellence. Was he, who was despised and rejected of men, indeed the Lord God Almighty? Of this fact, then, before all things else, would Peter have assured the unbelieving Jews, and Paul the inquisitive and credulous Athenians. This doctrine, so momentous, could not have been suppressed in preaching, to such a degree, as

\* John x. 30.

† John xvii. 22.

‡ John xiv. 9.



not once to find its way into the numerous discourses contained in the Acts of the Apostles. If Peter and Paul did not preach it, they cannot have believed it. If they did preach it, the eminently careful, faithful historian, St. Luke, could not have omitted this most prominent and striking point in their preaching.

I now offer you a consideration of very great, and, it seems to me, decisive weight. If our Saviour were the almighty Creator, there was a time when his disciples first became aware of the fact; for they could not have believed it from the beginning. When Peter rebuked him, when they all forsook him, when they went weeping to his sepulchre, they could not have regarded him as God. Now, whenever they learned the fact of his supreme divinity, it must have wrought a marvellous and entire change in their feelings and conduct,—it must have created the most strongly marked epoch in the experience of their lives. It must have been with the utmost awe, with emotions of overpowering fulness, that they ascertained that the Creator of all worlds had been dwelling with them, calling them his brethren, and submitting to their petulant and inconstant humors,—had broken bread for them, and even washed their feet. Must not such a stupendous discovery have left some trace of itself in the sacred record? Could it have taken place, without at least some notice of the time when, and the circumstances under which it was made? Did they first become aware of this fact after his resurrection? How then can we account for their preserving their former familiar, fraternal style of intercourse with him till the morning of the ascension? And yet their conversation with him on that very morning differs not in the least, as to its general tone and character, from those which they had held with him before his death. Or was it on the day of Pentecost that this amazing fact



first became known to them? If so, would not Peter's discourse have been full of this new revelation? Could he have so entirely veiled the light that had just burst upon him, as coolly to commence his discourse: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him," and to utter not a single word, which the most astute critic can torture into a recognition of the deity of Christ? But it is impossible for the Trinitarian to say when the apostles were first apprised of this truth; nor is there, in the gospels or the Acts of the Apostles, the faintest trace of such a discovery having been made at any time. Now I could more easily account for the omission of all notice of our Saviour's birth, or death, or resurrection, or ascension, than for the omission of the announcement of this, — the most amazing and momentous fact of all, — indeed, the most interesting and important fact in the world's whole history.

I next remark that the whole phraseology of the New Testament, with regard to our Saviour, implies his created existence, and subordinate rank. In the first place, he is constantly called the *Son* of God. The word *Son*, as applied to him, either has, or has not, a meaning. If it has no meaning, then must it have been employed by our Saviour and his apostles in idle mockery of man's understanding, — a supposition unworthy to be entertained for a moment, and yet one, which our Trinitarian brethren cannot, it seems to me, entirely disavow. But if the word *Son* does mean any thing, the least that it can imply is, that the Son owes his existence to the Father, therefore is not self-existent, did not then exist from all eternity, and consequently is not God.

I would next advert to the mode in which our Saviour uniformly speaks of himself. Here are some of his declara-

tions, which I might multiply indefinitely: "My Father is greater than I."\* "I can of mine own self do nothing."† "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."‡ "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me."§ "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."|| "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."¶ "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."\*\* "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God."†† "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."‡‡ But I might go on in this way, and quote from every chapter in the gospels, and from every verse in which our Saviour speaks, and show you every attribute of supreme divinity disclaimed, over and over again, from his own lips, without your being able to point to a single instance, in which he claims for himself any exclusively divine attribute. I might, also, show him to you praying to his Father, spending whole nights in supplication to Him, beseeching Him, if possible, to take from him the cup of death, and commending his departing spirit into the Father's hands.

It is said that Christ spoke and did thus in his human nature. To this I reply, in the first place, that the doctrine of the two natures of Christ is not claimed, even by its advocates, as a doctrine of revelation. They quote no declaration, or passage of Scripture, in which they profess to find this doctrine expressed or implied. It is confessedly an hypothesis, which they have assumed, as the only

\* John xiv. 28.

† John v. 30.

‡ John xiv. 10.

§ John viii. 42.

|| John iv. 34.

¶ Mark xiii. 32.

\*\* John iii. 16.

†† Matt. xix. 17.

‡‡ John xx. 17.

mode in which they can reconcile Christ's supreme divinity with his own reiterated assertions to the contrary.

But this hypothesis of the two natures is far from obviating the difficulty, which it was designed to remove. If Christ be the supreme God, and if it be of any importance for mankind to know the fact, it was of equal importance for him to have made the fact known, nor can there have been any adequate reason for his concealing it. Moreover, those, who maintain the doctrine of two natures, virtually charge our Saviour with equivocation. For does not the word *I* include the whole of the person speaking? I myself am composed of body and mind. I know that *five and five are ten*. My body does not know it; but my mind knows it. Now suppose that I should say, "I do not know how much *five and five* are," and should afterwards explain myself by saying, "My body does not know it, and, when I spoke, I had reference to my body," what would you think of my honesty, or good sense? You would certainly infer that I had made utter shipwreck of one or the other. Or suppose that I should say, "I am unable to lift this manuscript," and when you looked to see if I were smitten with a sudden paralysis, I should add, "I only mean that my mind cannot lift it, — my body can," you would surely regard my speech as any thing but wise, and my intellect as any thing but sane. Yet such is the imputation, which the doctrine of the two natures casts upon our Saviour; and his exalted mission, and the momentous subjects on which he spoke, only render the imputation the more gross and unworthy. If our Saviour was the supreme God, he knew the day and hour, which he said that he did not know, — he had himself the power to perform those works, which he said that he could not perform of himself, — he was the equal of the Father, whom he called greater than himself; and there remains

no way, in which you can interpret these essentially false declarations from his lips, without casting reproach upon him, in whose pure and transparent spirit I believe that there was no guile. I press this point the more urgently, because to my eye the doctrine of our Saviour's supreme divinity renders all his recorded discourses a tissue of prevarication, fitted only to bewilder and mislead his hearers.

The hypothesis of the two natures also fails, inasmuch as Christ expressly disclaims the peculiar attributes of deity in some of those relations and offices, which it is contended that he fills by virtue of his divine nature. I know not how often I have seen and heard the number, variety, and magnitude of his miracles, and his sovereign sway over diseases and the elements, cited as demonstrative proof of his supreme divinity. But it is of these very miracles that he says: "The works that I do bear witness of me, that *the Father hath sent me.*"\* It is often said, also, that none but God can be the final judge of man; and Christ's designated office as judge of the living and the dead is referred to in every defence of the Trinity, as proof positive of his supreme divinity. But of this office he says: "*The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son;*" and, a few sentences afterward, assigns not his deity, nor even his close connection with the Father, but, on the other hand, his relationship to man, as the reason why he is appointed man's judge: "He hath given him authority to execute judgment also, *because he is the Son of man.*"†

We have then our Saviour's uniform and often repeated testimony to his own created existence and subordinate rank, in maintaining which we cannot surely be guilty of denying the Lord Jesus, inasmuch as we fasten our faith upon his own words.

\* John v. 36.

† John v. 22, 27.



Do we look to the rest of the New Testament? We still find our Saviour spoken of as a created and subordinate being. "Him hath God ordained,"—"Him hath God raised up,"—"Him hath God set forth,"—is the burden of the apostolic preaching. How many times do the apostles designate the Almighty as the *God*, or the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*! Says St. Paul: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."\* And again: "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."† Says St. John: "God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;" and again, in the same chapter: "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."‡ The apostles speak also of Christ, in his glorified state, as making intercession for his Church. "Who also maketh intercession for us."§ "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."|| If Christ be God, to whom does he pray?

The apostles speak of Christ as subordinate to the Father, even in those passages, in which they ascribe to him the highest exaltation and glory; nay, in the very passages, which are currently quoted in proof of his supreme divinity, on the alleged ground that such honor can be rendered to no created being. Take this passage for instance: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."¶ *God hath exalted him,—God hath given him a name,—to the glory of God the Father.*

\* 1 Tim. ii. 5.

† 1 Cor. iii. 23.

‡ 1 John iv. 10, 14.

§ Rom. viii. 34.

|| 1 John ii. 1.

¶ Phil. ii. 9, 11.

How could his derived and subordinate nature have been more strongly expressed?

There is a passage in one of St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, where the extent and universality of Christ's reign are spoken of in more ample and lofty terms than anywhere else in the New Testament; but, as if to preclude the inference of his independent and supreme divinity, the apostle adds: "When all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." \*

I might also quote that passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where God is represented as saying to Christ, in language borrowed from the Old Testament (in which a more free use is made of the word *God*, than in the New), "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;" but it is added, "God, even *thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows," † — a passage, which suggests the inquiry, — If Christ was the supreme God, who was his God, who were his fellows, and who anointed him? And throughout the introduction of this epistle, in which it seems the writer's sole object to heap the praises of a pious and grateful heart upon the glorified Redeemer, we have multiplied recognitions of his subordinate rank with reference to the Father. "Whom he *hath appointed* heir of all things, *by whom* also he made the worlds." ‡ "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, *to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*; for both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified, *are all of one*: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*; saying, I will declare thy name

\* 1 Cor. xv. 24-28.

† Heb. i. 8, 9.

‡ Heb. i. 2.

unto my brethren: in the midst of the church *will I sing praise unto thee.* And again, *I will put my trust in him.* And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. . . . In all things it behooved him to be like unto his brethren. . . . In that he himself hath suffered, *being tempted*, he is able to succor them that are tempted.”\* Now all these things may be said of the most highly exalted of God’s children; but surely not of God himself. Men are not God’s brethren. God cannot sing praise to himself. God cannot be tempted; nor can he have been made perfect through sufferings.

In the Epistle to the Colossians, where it is said of Christ, that “by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth,” and that “he is before all things,” he is in the same sentence styled, not the Uncreated, but “the first-born of every creature,” therefore not self-existent, and consequently not God.†

In the Apocalypse, where the highest titles and honors are given to our Saviour, and where the rapt apostle sees the ransomed hosts casting down their crowns before him, he is still represented as a created being. Though he styles himself “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last,”‡ he still indicates that these expressions denote not the uncreated source of being, but the first-born Son; for he afterward calls himself “*the beginning of the creation of God.*”§ And again, while the redeemed are represented as assigning for the reason of their praise to the Father: “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created;”|| to the Son their words are: “Thou *wast slain*, and hast redeemed us *unto God* by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and

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\* Heb. ii. 10-18.

§ Rev. iii. 14.

† Col. i. 15-17.

|| Rev. iv. 11.

‡ Rev. i. 11.



nation, and hast made us *unto our God* kings and priests,"\* — an ascription, of which every candid mind must see at once that the supreme God cannot be the subject.

I next remark, that Christ did not present himself as an object of adoration, and that he commanded his disciples to offer prayer, not to himself, but to his Father. I know not what could be more explicit than the following passage, where, speaking of the time when he should no longer be with his disciples, he says to them: "In that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."†

In accordance with these words of their Master, all the recorded prayers of the apostles are directed to God, generally through Christ, or in his name; nor do they, in a single instance, exhort their converts to pray or to give thanks to Jesus, but to God the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The only case, I believe, in which authority for prayer to Christ is drawn from the New Testament, is that of the dying Stephen, when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."‡ But this was not prayer. This was not an address to an invisible being. It was speaking to one whom he saw. The heavens were opened, and he saw "Jesus standing on the right hand of God." He had a vision of the risen Saviour, with a countenance and gesture of welcome for his dying servant. He thus commended his spirit to one who had personally appeared, to lead him through the dark valley to the mansion of eternal rest.

One word more concerning this text. In our common Bible, it reads: "They stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." But you will

\* Rev. v. 9, 10.

† John xvi. 23.

‡ Acts vii. 59.



see that the word *God* is printed in italics. In this type are printed those words in the translation, which have no corresponding words in the original, but which the translators saw fit to supply. There are many, I suppose, who do not know what the italics in the Bible mean; and the explanation of them ought to be printed in every copy. This text, omitting the word inserted by the translators, would read: "They stoned Stephen, calling upon, or invoking, [of course the person last named, and that is Jesus,] and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." There is another instance, in which our translators have inserted the same word *God*. It is this: "Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us."\* The words of *God*, are in italics, and have nothing corresponding to them in the original, which, literally rendered, reads: "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us."

But, to return from this digression, there is not, in the New Testament a single instance of prayer to Jesus, nor is there a single case, in which homage is paid to him in the way in which it is paid to God. There are indeed many ascriptions of praise to him; but they are always accompanied with the specific designation of his work and office as Mediator, and generally with an express reference to the eternal Father as alone supreme. But there are several instances, in which persons are said to have *worshipped* Jesus. The word translated *worship*, however, does not necessarily denote the rendering of divine honors, but simply prostration, or other external marks of homage or reverence, such as are paid by inferiors to superiors, by subjects to princes, and by servants to masters. For instance, the servant in the parable, who owed a thousand

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\* 1 John iii. 16.

talents, fell down at his master's feet, "and *worshipped* him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."\* Indeed, most of these cases of *worship* or prostration before our Saviour were cases of suppliants asking favors of him, at a time when, it is generally contended by Trinitarians, our Saviour's supreme divinity had not yet been made known.

Such is the state of facts with reference to the recognition of our Saviour's supreme divinity by the apostles, in appropriate acts of devotion. Now, that neither prayer nor divine honors should have been rendered to our Saviour by his apostles seems to me entirely unaccountable, if he were properly the subject of them. It is equally unaccountable, that, if they had been rendered, no instance of the kind should have remained on record in the New Testament. And still more strange is it, that, if Jesus be the supreme God, he himself should not only have omitted to enjoin, but should have expressly forbidden prayer to himself, and should have prescribed a mode of prayer, in which he was indeed to be recognized as the Mediator, but not as the object of prayer.

I will now ask your attention to some of the single texts urged by those who maintain the supreme deity of Christ. I do not intend (for I have not time) to bring forward all the proof-texts that have been urged or relied upon. But I shall choose those, which seem to me the strongest, and those on which eminent Trinitarians have laid the most stress. I shall purposely omit only those, on which no independent reliance is placed, but which are brought forward as subsidiary to the argument based upon the others. And let me add, that, should I omit in this lecture the consideration of texts, which any of you desire to hear dis-

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\* Matthew xviii. 26.

cussed, if you will name such texts to me, they shall be taken up in the next lecture.

Those, who maintain the supreme divinity of our Saviour, rest for this doctrine, if I am not mistaken, solely on single texts. They draw no argument from the general tone and spirit of the New Testament. They admit that the argument from this source, so far as it has any bearing, goes against them. But they deem it overborne by the clearness and weight of the single texts, which they quote in behalf of their dogma.

Of these texts, I set aside, as having no bearing on the doctrine in question, those, which simply teach our Saviour's continued presence with his Church, and his power over the spiritual creation of God; for these are truths of which I entertain not the slightest doubt; they imply no more than a headship over the Church, conferred by the Father, and are but the fulfilment of those words of our Saviour: "All power *is given* unto me in heaven and in earth."\* *Is given*, -- given then by the Being, to whom it of right belonged, and who is as competent to constitute the ascended Redeemer head of the whole spiritual family above and below, as to make you and me fathers and heads of our own little households. Nor need we here consider those texts which imply, or seem to imply, our Saviour's pre-existence; for the question, whether he existed before his birth in Bethlehem, is entirely independent of that of his supreme divinity.

The only text from the Old Testament, much relied on by the advocates of the doctrine in question, is this from Isaiah: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder:

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\* Matthew xxvii. 18.

and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, *the mighty God*, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”\* In this text, the Hebrew word rendered *God*, is not *Elohim*, the word commonly so rendered; but *El*, of which *God* is only a secondary meaning. The Hebrew Lexicons give for its meaning, *first* (as an adjective), *strong, mighty*; *secondly* (as an abstract noun), *strength, power*; and *thirdly* and often (by a natural transfer from an abstract to a concrete sense), *God*. Our translators chose the *last* of the *three* meanings. I am disposed to think the *first* the true signification here, and should render the passage: “He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Strong, Mighty, Father of eternity, that is, Author of eternal life [or, perhaps, Father or Author of an age, — a new age or dispensation], Prince of Peace.”

Another text much relied on is from the Epistle to the Philippians: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, *thought it not robbery to be equal with God*; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.”† The true sense of this passage, according to many *Trinitarian* commentators, is this: “Let the same mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though in the form, the image of God, yet *did not covet to appear as God*, that is, did not exalt or magnify himself; but, on the other hand, humbled himself; and took upon him the form of a servant.” But, however this passage may be interpreted, any possible inference from it in favor of the supreme divinity of Christ is negatived by the sequel of the sentence, in which the apostle says that, on account of his thus humbling himself, “*God has highly exalted him, and has given him a name above every name, that at the*

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\* Isaiah ix. 6.

† Philippians ii. 5-7.



name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . *to the glory of God the Father.*"

Another important text is this from the Epistle to the Romans: "Whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, *God blessed for ever.* Amen."\* The New Testament, like all books of that age, was originally written without stops, and without division of sentences. The stops have been inserted, and the sentences divided in comparatively recent times. I suppose, in common with many very eminent biblical critics, that, in this passage, there should be a full stop after the words, *over all*; and that the words, "God blessed for ever, — Amen," were added as a doxology by the apostle, in the way, in which, in several instances, he has inserted a doxology in the midst of a paragraph.

The exclamation of Thomas, when he recognized his risen Master, "*My Lord and my God,*"† is quoted as a proof-text for the doctrine under discussion, though I am surprised that it should be. It was a mere exclamation of glad astonishment on the part of Thomas. It was not addressed to Christ; for it is not in the vocative case, which is used in the Greek when a person is spoken to. The words *Lord* and *God* are both in the nominative case. The sentence is elliptical; and, were we to supply the ellipsis, it would, as I suppose, read thus: "It is my Lord and my God, that has brought this glorious event to pass." But it was an abrupt, fragmentary exclamation, such as would naturally spring from overwhelming surprise, — not profane, because uttered in deep solemnity and awe, and in clear recognition of the divine hand, which had raised his Master from the dead. It was the most natural of all exclamations under the circumstances in which it was uttered.

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\* Romans ix. 5.

† John xx. 28.

Suppose that some one, whom we knew to have been long dead, should stand forth here in the presence of us all, would not the exclamation, *My God*, be the solemn, fervent, heart-stricken utterance of every one present? That any argument should ever have been based upon this exclamation seems to me excessively strange, when I consider the whole connection in which it stands. Thomas had, a moment before, expressed his entire unbelief as to the identity of his Master. Jesus then showed him his wounds, to convince him of his identity. This was all that he undertook to prove to Thomas, and all that the wounds could prove. Now, if Thomas had ever believed Christ to be God, he would never have doubted his power to rise from the dead. His scepticism with regard to the resurrection proves that he had not previously believed that Christ was God. But Christ's resurrection no more proved him to be God, than the rising of Lazarus proved him to be God. Thomas had therefore had no proof of his Master's supreme divinity presented to his mind; and one, so slow to believe as he was, could hardly have leaped to so momentous a conclusion, without something on which to base it.

The next passage, to which I shall refer, is this from the first Epistle to Timothy: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: *God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received into glory.*"\* There is much discrepancy with regard to the reading of this passage among the early manuscripts and versions; but, to my mind, the balance of argument is in favor of the common reading, and the text conveys to my apprehension nothing, which I do not gladly believe and embrace. Nay, I would adopt the passage as embodying my confession of

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\* 1 Timothy iii. 16.

faith with regard to Jesus Christ. I joyfully and thankfully acknowledge, that, in the person, in the moral attributes, in the unquenchable love of Jesus, God *was manifest in the flesh*, — that he was *justified*, that is, had false notions and sentiments concerning himself uprooted, and true ideas and feelings implanted among men, *through* the workings of *his spirit*, — that *angels beheld* with adoration this display of divine wisdom and love, — that God thus manifested was *proclaimed to the Gentiles*, — *believed on in the world*, — *received in glory*, (for such is the literal rendering of the words,) that is, gloriously received and welcomed in the hearts of Christ's true disciples.

In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Paul bids the Ephesian elders to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”\* *Lord* occurs here instead of *God* in many of the earlier manuscripts and versions, and is deemed the true reading by the best critics. But I will take the text as it stands, and will seek no advantage from the difference of reading. Now, were it the general voice of the New Testament that the supreme God suffered, and died, and shed his blood upon the cross, I should certainly interpret this text as referring to his death. But, the contrary being the voice of the New Testament, if I admit the common reading of this passage, I must interpret it in accordance with what I know St. Paul to have believed and taught. Now St. Paul uniformly taught that “God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;” and I must, therefore, suppose *blood*, in the passage under discussion, to denote *Son*, as it does, in common with the word *flesh*, in all languages, both ancient and modern. “He hath purchased with his own blood,” that is, with his own *Son*.

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\* Acts xx. 28.



I now ask your attention, for a few moments, to the introduction of St. John's Gospel. In order to understand this, we must look at the purpose for which St. John wrote his Gospel. On this subject, we are fortunate in having, among others, a competent and unimpeachable witness in Irenæus, — a friend and pupil of Polycarp, who was a personal friend of St. John. It is the uniform testimony of antiquity, that St. John wrote his Gospel after the other three, and at Ephesus, — the head-quarters of the Gnostic heresy, which was the first wide departure from the simplicity of the Christian faith; and Irenæus says, that the beloved disciple wrote his Gospel for the express purpose of refuting the false and absurd notions, which the Gnostics were beginning to spread in Asia Minor. It concerns us then to know what the Gnostics believed. They engrafted upon the Christian faith a hybrid philosophy, or to speak more correctly, they engrafted some few Christian phrases and ideas upon a hybrid philosophy, in which Platonism was blended with the Oriental mysticism. They maintained that the supreme God dwelt in the remote heavens, surrounded by chosen spirits, *Æons* (as they called them), and gave himself very little concern with what took place upon earth; that the world was created by an inferior and imperfect being, who was also the author of the Jewish dispensation; that Christ was sent by the supreme God to deliver men from the tyranny of this creator, and from the yoke of his law; that there were also various created spirits, or *Æons*, sustaining different offices, independently for the most part of the supreme Deity, the names of some of which *Æons* were *Life*, *Light*, and, particularly, the *Logos* or *Word*, which represented the divine *Reason* or *Wisdom*; and that the *Æon Light* became incarnate in John the Baptist. All these spiritual existences were represented as distinct from one



another, and from the supreme God, so that the system was a sublimated form of polytheism. To fuse these disjointed fragments of deity into one, — to rebuke these babblings of philosophy, falsely so called, about a divided sceptre and a scattered divinity, — this was the purpose of St. John's introduction. And not only so; but we find that the same pervading purpose gives shape, and character, and, as it were, the key-note, to his whole Gospel. With this object in view, it was incumbent on him to show that *Life*, and *Light*, and the *Logos* or *Word*, were not distinct from the supreme God; that the supreme God created the world, and gave the Jewish law; that the same God sent John, the forerunner; and that the same God sent Jesus Christ, not to destroy, but to complete the law, — not to deliver men from its tyranny, but to finish for them the work, which the law had begun. And this is shown in the first *eighteen* verses of the gospel, — how comprehensively and beautifully you will see, if you keep in mind what I have told you of the Gnostic notion, while I read the passage to you, with such explanations that may be requisite.

*In the beginning was the Word*, the Logos, the divine Reason or Wisdom, — not a created being, nor yet an emanation from the Supreme; but it always existed, — *the Word was with God*, and never had a separate existence; *and the Word was God*, was and is inseparable from his essence and his attributes. *The same Word*, the same divine Wisdom, repeats the evangelist, *was in the beginning with God*. And now St. John directs his attention to another of the Gnostic errors, namely, that of the world's having been created by an inferior divinity. *All things*, says St. John, *were made by him*, that is, by God (not by the Word, — *him* refers to *God*, which is the nearest preceding noun to which it can refer). All things were

made by the supreme God, *and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him also was Life; and the Life was the Light of men.* Life and Light are not distinct essences; but God is the source of life, and, where it flows from him, light flows with it. *And the Light shines in darkness; but the darkness comprehended it not.* God has shed light upon men in the darkest times, though men have chosen darkness rather than light.

*There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came for a witness, to bear testimony of the light, concerning the divine light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that light, not himself an Æon, a spiritual emanation, — he was a man, like other men; but was sent to bear witness of the Light.* He, from whom he came, *God, was the true Light that enlightens every man that comes into the world.* God had not removed himself from his creation, had not dwelt apart in the remote heavens. *He was already, he was always in the world, and the world had been made by him; yet the world knew him not. He had come to his own, to the Jewish nation, his favored and covenant people; but his own received him not; that is, as a nation, they had in general disowned and rejected him in heart and deed, though not in name. But to as many as received him, to the patriarchs and to the faithful among their posterity, to them who believed on his name, he gave power to become the sons of God, his own spiritual children, born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man (children not in any human or earthly sense), but of God.*

*And, in these latter days, the Word, the divine Wisdom, became flesh, and dwelt among men; and we, I and my fellow-apostles, beheld its glory, — the glory of the only begotten, of the chosen Son, of the Father, full of mercy and of truth.*

*John bore testimony concerning him, and cried, saying, This is he, of whom I said, He that cometh after me, has taken precedence of me ; for he was before me, — was my superior. And of his fulness, of the rich truth and mercy of the Word made flesh, have we all received ; yet not, as false teachers now say, mercy instead of wrath, a silken instead of an iron yoke, but grace for grace, — one gracious dispensation to supersede another. For the law was given through Moses, and that was a law of mercy, adapted to its own times ; but now mercy and truth for all times have come through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him, has made him known.*

Thus we see that the introduction of John's gospel, so far from authorizing the breaking up of the divine nature into a plurality of persons, is a noble assertion and vindication of the divine unity, well worthy the pen of inspiration, — a passage, in which, as with a prophet's wand, he waves back to their native nothingness the chimeras of an arrogant and impious philosophy.

But I have spoken long enough, perhaps too long. I have shown you, as I trust, that the general tenor of the New Testament, and numberless express declarations of our Saviour and his apostles, oblige us to regard him, though second only to the Father, as holding with reference to the Father a derived existence, and a subordinate rank. I have heaped up an amount of testimony, which much more than convinces me, — which leaves my own mind, I can truly say, without the shadow of a doubt, — with a conviction, which has no room to grow stronger. I have also, I think, selected all the really strong and difficult texts alleged in proof of the opposite doctrine. Some of them, I confess, would have weight, were they not overborne by such an overwhelming amount of testi-

mony on the other side. But not one of them requires, and some of them do not in my view admit, the interpretation, which favors the supreme divinity of Christ.

I now commend the subject to your own serious reflection and study. But, while you seek and prize just ideas of your Saviour's rank and character, remember that your truest knowledge of him, is heart-knowledge, — that knowledge, which you can have only by being like him, — by following him, — by having "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

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THE

# LIFE TO COME.

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BY REV. A. P. PUTNAM.

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"Having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." — 1 TIM. iv. 8.

THE life that is to come! What grander and more solemn theme can engage the human mind than this? What subject has for us so profound and thrilling an interest? Beyond the veil that is suspended just before us, and that limits the mortal view, stretches out the vast, spiritual, eternal world. Thither the countless myriads who have lived and died on the earth have gone. Many who were dearer to us than our very life have crossed the boundary-line, and entered the mysterious domain. And we ourselves, gifted with immortality as they, are also moving constantly and irresistibly on to the same great destination, and shall soon be there. That unseen, stupendous realm, where are gathered so many of the heart's best treasures, whither have gone forth the multitudinous hopes and fears, the deepest dreads and longings, of all who have peopled the earth; and whence, of the innumerable millions who have passed into the solemn silence, not one has returned to tell us of what he has there seen and heard and felt, — that invisible and boundless realm, how, in our very

souls, we do yearn to know its mysteries and behold its wonders! "What shall we be and where, when the brief, vanishing life that now is shall be ended?" is the deep, affecting inquiry which all of us not seldom address to ourselves, even amidst the crowding cares and vanities of our daily experience. There is no interrogatory that is so important, so momentous to us, in its meaning and solution, as this,—none which it is so profitable and well to consider, and also, so far as we can or may, to answer.

Yet how little it is that we can really know with certainty about the future world! Successive generations, the purest and most gifted of the race, have sought to peer into the great unknown, and tell its secrets; but in vain. How crude, absurd, ridiculous, seem to us now many of the theories of the life to come which they have formed, and which, it may be, have held no very limited sway over the minds of men! Even the last desperate attempt of the popular mind to penetrate the awful veil, and make familiar to us the things that are hidden beyond it, has ended in failure. Modern Spiritualism has revealed to us no new truth. It has given us nothing which we did not know before. Our refuge, after all, is mainly in the Scriptures: there lies the world's great comfort still. And yet, even there, while there is so much to animate and satisfy the soul, how many an earnest inquiry and searching gaze fail of their answering object! For some wise and good reason, God has purposely left us to know only in part, and to walk by faith. By the study of the word of God, by the exercise of the reason, and by the help of the hints and analogies of nature and of life, it is given us to behold enough to encourage us to continue steadfastly and joyfully that walk by faith, until at last we shall walk by sight, and know even as also we are known.

Still it may truly be said, that, as time has rolled on, no



little progress has been made in just and rational conceptions of life and destiny. It seems to us, in such an age as this, strange and almost incredible, that such horrible views of this subject should ever have long and extensively prevailed in the world, as have really constituted an essential part of the religious faith of the ages, and exerted their baleful influence upon unnumbered multitudes of souls. Heaven has been believed to be a vast, separate, localized region, — an immense and glorious city, perhaps, — situated far up, as it were, at the zenith of the universe, and enriched with walls of jasper, gates of pearl, and streets of gold; and hell has been conceived of as a deep and awful lake of burning fire and brimstone, at the nadir of the universe or in the centre of the earth, where all who die in a state of impenitence and sin are tormented, with inconceivable agonies, for ever and ever. The Christian world have generally believed in the resurrection of the fleshly body at what they have called the last great day, when they have supposed that Christ would visibly come in his glory, attended by angels, and would summon before his judgment-seat the awakened world of immortals, to sentence to heaven the righteous, and the wicked to hell. They have thought of the eternal state of both classes of men, as thus unalterably fixed at death, — the one to be, then and for ever, entirely and perfectly happy; the other to be, then and for ever, entirely and perfectly miserable. They have recognized no destined life of aspiration and progress for the former; no possible chance of repentance and recovery for the latter. The present alone, they have thought, is the season of probation and opportunity. Beyond the veil, God's moral government changes, and God is changed himself. His ear is everlastingly closed to the cry of his sorrowing, suffering children, as it comes borne up to him on the hot, ascending flame and breath of

the pit ; while it is open only to the resounding praises, the rapturous exultations, of the redeemed around his throne. Here, in the life that now is, God is love ; there, in the life that is to come, he is a consuming fire.

All such views of the future world and the divine administration of affairs, as it stands related to it, seem to us gross, irrational, and false ; alike abhorrent to the best reason and higher instincts of the soul, and derogatory to the character and revealed truth of God.

Heaven and hell are not distant, separate, localized regions, somewhere in the mighty universe of God, but are states or conditions of the soul.

Heaven, — it is the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is a kingdom that is not outward, but spiritual. “The kingdom of God is within you.” When one, through faith in Christ’s truth, through obedience to his divine precepts, and through a faithful imitation of his example and life, enters into a conscious state of purity, rectitude, and blessedness ; when thus he comes to feel that he is in harmony with God as well as with himself and that he has a sure inward rest which the world cannot give or take away, — he enters into heaven. Heaven, therefore, is here in the life that now is, as well as in that which is to come. The Christian on earth has already begun to taste its joys and satisfactions. As, in all the interminable future that lies before him, he makes progress in the divine way, he will come to know more and more largely the measure of its power and happiness. Yet it is true that here and now he is in heaven ; and, as long as he lives the life of faith and holiness, he cannot lose the glorious boon that has been given him. Go where he may, whatever the sorrows and sufferings he may be called upon to endure, — be it earthly loss or domestic bereavement, the prisoner’s dungeon or the martyr’s flame, — he is still

in heaven ; since God is approvingly with him, and Christ's benediction is upon him, and conscience whispers its words of peace and promise : as when Paul and Silas, incarcerated within gloomy walls in Philippi, prayed and sang praises at midnight to God.

Nor is hell the vast, yawning, visible gulf of despair and woe which the Christian world has so widely believed it to be. It is not an outward region of darkness, not a bottomless pit, not a place of torment into which embodied or disembodied souls are to be thrust, and punished for ever. Hell, like heaven, is a state or condition of the soul ; and it is a state or condition that is experienced here, just as surely as it may be experienced hereafter. Hell is internal discord and unrest. It is sin in the soul, quenching its holy light, filling it with impurity and disease, weakening its celestial power, demoralizing its glorious functions, torturing it with the stings of remorse, and leaving it without God or without hope in the world. Think of the multitudes who throng the streets, or fill the haunts of vice and shame in our cities, and who are given over to a life of vanity and crime ; who are the victims of every inordinate lust and affection ; who are brutalized by the unrestrained indulgence of every bad thought of the mind and passion of the heart ; whose countenances are lurid and scarred with the baleful fires of cruelty, hate, jealousy, and revenge ; whose homes are the perpetual scenes of violence, wrong, and depravity, where only are heard the voices of jest, anger, and profanity, and all knowledge and love and pursuit of heavenly things are utter strangers for ever, — and say if, in all this ignorance, filth, blasphemy, inhumanity, and woe, there is not a present and actual hell on earth, which is most fitly described in the vivid and terrible imagery by which the Bible portrays the doom of the wicked. Hell in the future is but the continuance of some



such life in the soul as this; only that the longer sin is cherished as the chosen part of the moral nature, the offending sufferer entails upon himself an ever-increasing amount of wretchedness, and prosecutes, with fearfully augmenting speed and success, the work of his undoing. Sin, now and ever, is its own awful punishment; and there, in the soul that sinneth, and so long as it sinneth, are the undying worm and the unquenchable fire. Hell is absence from God. It is the hiding of His countenance. There is no heaven where His smile is not, but only orphanage and anguish. Sin where or when we may, we so far withdraw ourselves from His blessed companionship, and avert from us His benignant look, and betake ourselves into the outer darkness, where, it is not too much to say, there are weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

As heaven and hell are not localized spheres in the infinite universe of space, but are only certain spiritual conditions or states which we experience here and hereafter, there is no particular place in that boundless expanse to which we must needs go, and in which we must needs be confined. Just where we die in the body, and "shuffle off this mortal coil," we awake to the new life of the spirit, and continue the ceaseless existence of our conscious being. We, each one, indeed, like Judas, go to our own place,—the place for which we are fitted, the place for which we have prepared ourselves in all our earthly history. But that place is a state or condition. We take with us into the eternal world what we carry with us out of this,—the same inward affections, tastes, propensities, sympathies, and will. Death has no power to change the character of our spiritual nature. It is the body alone that suffers change. The immortal soul lives on. It enters the life that is to come just as it leaves the life that now is. Whether its immediate portion will be hell or heaven there, depends



upon whether its choice was hell or heaven here. There it is free, doubtless, to roam at its will. But it never can fly from itself; and, wherever it wanders, it will ever seek and will ever find, through a law as irresistible as that of gravitation, the companionships and associations that are most congenial to it. It may be that, even now, we are environed, beset, and influenced by unseen spirits, that are good or bad, according as we are ourselves holy or ungodly in heart or life; and, as we awake in the great invisible realms, we may possibly find, that we are in the very midst of beings and surroundings which have been naturally attracted to us by our virtues or vices, by our love of God or love of the world, the flesh, and the devil. So far as modern Spiritualism has emphasized this and kindred doctrines; so far as it has taught that we live, and move, and have our being, in a spiritual universe even more than in the material, and that we are shut in, and acted upon, and greatly affected, by a thousand intelligent agencies and subtle influences of the other world,—it is entitled, I think, to respectful consideration, not to say a most serious and solemn heed. Not that these views are peculiar to Spiritualism, or new to the minds of men; but only that recently they have been more distinctly and forcibly brought before us, and urged upon our attention.

But some will say, "As the dead thus awake to the immortal life, in what body do they come?" We believe in no resurrection of these visible, material forms of flesh and blood; nor do we think that the passages in the Scripture which refer to this subject necessitate what seems to us such a gross, unspiritual interpretation. They speak, indeed, of the resurrection of the dead, the coming forth of the departed from their graves. But this language is natural to us all, whether we believe in the resurrection of the material body or not. It is poetic, striking, inevitable. It

simply means the re-appearance, in the spiritual world or at the judgment, of those who have passed from the mortal life ; not so much their earthly forms, but the vanished ones themselves, — their undying personalities, their imperishable souls.

In what body do they come ? Not the body of flesh and blood. That dissolves, decays. It enters into new forms of vegetable and animal life, and in the process of time its particles become distributed, as it were, throughout the earth. It is consumed, like Wickliffe's bones, by fire ; its ashes given to the stream which bears them on to the sea : and whence shall it come forth in the resurrection ? It is divided and scattered, like many a soldier's, over successive battlefields, where it has been cleft by the sabre, or torn by shot and shell : and how shall it rise again to life, in all its symmetry and entireness ? The arguments or answers by which these fatal objections to the doctrine in question are met, and which claim, that, as God is infinite in power, he can and will, by a wonderful miracle, at the last great day, bring together, from however widely separated points, the rent or disintegrated parts of the bodies of men, and make them whole again ; and that the earth and sea and air will be all alive with disjointed portions of human forms, flying in every direction to seek their once companion dust ; or that some fragment or particle of the lifeless frame shall retain the vital principle until that august time, and that divine power shall rebuild it into an image, which, if it do not contain the identical constituent elements of its predecessor, shall yet be composed of exactly equivalent chemical ingredients, — these arguments, I say, are ludicrously wild and fanciful, and have no sufficient foundation in Scripture, as they have none in common sense.

Rather is it reasonable to suppose, that as there is a nat-

aral body, and also a spiritual body, so the latter, or its immortal germ, is even now tabernacled in the former; and that at death it is disengaged from its companion clay, and stands forth at once unharmed by fire or sword, by accident or disease, its texture and organization finer and more delicate than we can now conceive, itself perfect and beautiful for ever. And this is the resurrection. We shall not need to come back, ages hence, from a local heaven or hell, to enter again and re-inhabit the fleshly, material tenements in which we once sinned and suffered, in order to realize the consummation of our eternal destiny. We shall have risen already. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Nor in the "house from heaven," with which the soul is thus "clothed upon," does it lose for a moment its sure identity. Character gives to these earthly lineaments its own appropriate moral expression. More fully yet shall it shine through and reveal itself in the spiritual countenance. Something of form and feature which belongs to the material body may thus still lend itself to that which is invisible and imperishable. "All the angels," says Swedenborg, "are forms of their own affections." And then all those peculiar affinities and influences that distinguish any one whom we know or love, — the glance of the eye, the smile of the face, the tone of the voice, the play of the mind and manner, the silent power that steals forth from him, and the certain atmosphere that surrounds him, — by all of which we are enabled so quickly to recognize him as our own, — shall not something of it yet remain, and remain for ever, to make him still the same?

"Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate, yet the same."

The doctrine of the recognition of friends in heaven is one which it seems almost strange that any should ever have



been led to disbelieve. Why may not we suppose, that our guardian angels are the dear ones who have passed into the light before us; and that, when for us also the day shall break and the shadows flee away, theirs shall be the sweet, familiar faces that shall first dawn upon us from the dissolving gloom, and theirs the arms that shall extend to us the glad and blissful welcome? Let us never doubt, that, although they may not visibly come to us, yet we shall surely go to them.

And as death is the hour of resurrection, so is it the appropriate signal for the judgment. The scriptural language, which has been supposed to refer to a general assemblage of the race at some future awful day for final judgment, long ago had its fulfilment in the event of the destruction of Jerusalem, and in the momentous circumstances that immediately preceded or followed that important crisis in Jewish history. Or, if indeed it pointed to any thing that was more distant in its application, it looked for its ultimate accomplishment to those transcendent moments when the souls of men were to hasten from the earthly state into the more immediate presence of God. It is then, if ever, that we pass the solemn review, and are sentenced, each one to his proper place. It needs not the endless array of the congregated universe of intelligences, nor yet the audible voice of the Son of man. It is the word which he hath already declared; it is the unrolled map of the terrestrial life; it is the clearer vision of God, whom we have loved or offended; it is the full blaze of those stupendous revelations that await us as we exchange the mortal for immortality: it is these, and such as these, that shall judge us. It is here that we shall unerringly read our righteous awards, and it is in this tremendous presence that we shall rise or sink, according as we have done good or evil.



Nor do we accept the idea or doctrine, that the status in which the soul finds itself conditioned, as it enters upon its future life, is fixed and irrevocable for ever. As death has no power to effect a change in the essential character of one's spiritual nature, so it has none, we believe, to destroy his free moral agency. There is nothing in Scripture, or in reason, that teaches us that man will not still be the creature of motives, capable of voluntary choices, and subject to the influences of life's ever-unfolding revelations and phenomena. If one who is admitted to the society of the angels should *desire* to surrender his blessed inheritance and accept the portion of the unbelieving and impenitent, who shall say that he cannot and may not do it, however improbable it is that his choice will lie in that direction? Or if one who goes forth into the future, still an alien from God and the blessedness of the heavenly life, should repent of his evil courses, loathe the sin that has reigned over him, hunger and thirst after the immortal good, and aspire to something nobler and better, what shall hinder? Does God at death annul and annihilate for ever the power of the soul to will and to do, freely and fully, whatsoever it listeth? There is no sufficient authority for such a belief. Is it said that the soul, by its life of sin and of its consequences here, renders itself unable to rise above its helpless, undone condition there? The history of spiritual life on earth shows, that no soul can sink so deeply in moral evil as to lose entirely its power to rise by the Divine aid; and who will dare to limit the reach and the might of infinite grace?

"I dare not fix, with mete and bound,  
The love and power of God."

And if it be urged, that no sufficient motives and inducements will be held out in the future to dissuade the sinner

from his sad career, and attract him to goodness and God, it may, we think, be said in reply, that the soul will there have even a *more* vivid apprehension of the consequences of transgression than it could possibly have here; that many of the temptations which now beset it, and which are incident to a life in the flesh and in a world like this, cannot attend it then; and that, in the great spiritual universe, such wondrous manifestations of God's glory will disclose themselves to view, and such mighty and unprecedented agencies and instrumentalities will be employed to complete the grand redemptive work of Christ, that the sufferer must feel the force of unwonted influences and considerations drawing him on and up to heaven. Yes, we believe that repentance is possible in the life that is to come, as well as in the life that now is. And to suppose that whenever, now or hereafter, the soul is truly penitent, and cries for mercy, and struggles for deliverance and blessedness, God is relentless and unmoved, is to make the Deity a passionless and cruel tyrant, and to set at nought the whole tenor of his Holy Word. It is to attribute to him a character which we should abhor in any earthly parent or friend. A God like this is not the one that Christ has revealed to us,—infinitely tender and pitiful, ever longing and yearning for the return of his children, and quick and glad, like the father of the prodigal son, to run forth and welcome his wandering offspring the moment he sees them come back to the paternal embrace and mansion.

And this turning to God, of which I speak, is, we believe, to be, sooner or later, the act and experience of every soul that he has made. Accordingly we reject the doctrine, that any portion of the human race, any child of the Infinite Father, will lie down in everlasting torments. The popular doctrine of future eternal punishment, how-

ever its more skilful and cultivated defenders may seek to relieve it of its fiercer aspects and make it more acceptable to refined and humane people, is one which seems to us utterly inconsistent with the thought of God's infinite love, wisdom, and power; at war with all the best sentiments, instincts, and ideas of the human mind; and at variance with the general teachings and prevailing spirit of the New Testament.

The nature and the attributes of God are the sure pledge of the final extirpation of sin and suffering from the universe, and the commensurate reign, at last, of righteousness, peace, and joy.

There is no word that so fitly describes the very essence and character of the Divine Being, as *Love*. God is Love. That a Being, whose name and nature are Love itself, would create a soul and endow it with immortality, knowing at the same time that it would choose for itself a continued life of sin, and, in consequence, be endlessly and unspeakably miserable in hell, is a proposition whose unreasonableness seems too apparent to merit serious refutation. Infinite Goodness would surely *desire* and *will* the ultimate and eternal happiness of every intelligent creature, and would never rest content so long as a single soul remained still a stranger to the life and bliss of heaven.

What the *Infinite Love* would thus *require*, *Infinite Wisdom* could devise methods and instrumentalities to *accomplish*. The goodness of God is no blind force, subject to the caprices of fortune and the contingencies of defeat. Its forecast is as measureless as its kindness, its ways are equal to its wish. If it be the will or desire of the Divine Benevolence that all shall at length be holy and happy, the Divine Wisdom is abundantly able so to order or arrange the course and affairs of Providence, that this glorious result may be attained.



Then what God's *love* is good enough to *dictate*, and what his *wisdom* is adequate to *plan*, his infinite *power* is sufficiently mighty to *fulfil*. As no event can possibly occur to surprise the beneficent, pre-ordained arrangements of his wisdom, so is there no antagonistic element or agency in the universe that can defy his omnipotence to rob it of its victory. His infinite *love*, we say, requires the salvation at last of *all*. His infinite *wisdom* cannot fail to discover the needed *way*. His infinite *power* is ample to execute all that his *goodness* prompts him *to do*; and his *wisdom* directs him how to *perform*.

If, moreover, the doctrine of everlasting punishment is made to involve the idea of the ceaseless continuance of sin in the souls and lives of the lost, God's infinite holiness, also, is pledged to the accomplishment of the sublime consummation to which we look. Moral evil is the one only thing in the universe which God abhors, and which is at war against his righteous government. It would seem that his throne could never be quite secure, as certainly his reign could never be quite complete, except as every trace of its existence shall finally be obliterated from his dominions. His own glory, as well as his very nature, demands that at last it shall cease to be; and any arbitrary, eternal infliction of suffering or vengeance, beyond the hour of its extirpation, would be an act not less cruel and horrible in its spirit, than unproductive of any beneficent result.

Or, if it still be urged that God's justice requires that the sinner shall continue for ever to be punished after he shall have repented of his wickedness and forsaken it altogether, we claim that the penalties of Heaven's violated law are remedial in their design and character, and that Divine Justice is never so completely satisfied as when one ceases to do evil and learns to do well. "If we con



fess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Repentance return, restoration, — this is all that God asks of us; and, when it is secured, there is pardon, reconciliation, and peace. How long the memory of transgression may linger still in the mind, and how much the soul, by its life of sin on earth, may be retarded in its great march of progress through eternity, we do not know. But this is not the endless retribution which the popular doctrine of everlasting torment contemplates. Certain effects or consequences of sin may possibly thus endure for ever, or they may not. But we cannot believe that they will, in any event, interfere with the glorious growth, joy, and rest, which, we are persuaded, are the never-ending destiny of all who live.

Against this doctrine of the endless damnation of souls in hell, all the finer sensibilities, the humaner feelings, and the better hopes and prayers of our hearts, rise up in united protest. What a commentary upon the dogma in question it is, that, as one of its advocates has recently said, its opposite theory of the final and universal salvation of the race is "the beautiful dream of noble natures"! And so it is. Whatever is divine within us, all that is pure and true and good, calls for an end, at last, to every form of sin and woe, and for the perpetual and illimitable reign of righteousness and joy. And that which is divine in our own souls is but a transcript of the excellence and love that constitute the nature of our God.

And all this is the general lesson of Scripture as well. However the more gloomy views of the ancient pagan world, or the fanciful speculations of rabbinical writers, may have affected the minds of the authors of the New Testament, and colored their allusions to this general subject, yet the prevailing spirit of the gospel, and its apostolic prophecies concerning the great future that is to be,

afford us a sufficient foundation for our faith in the cheering, thrilling doctrine which we hold. Christ reveals to us a God who is an infinite Father, and whose love cannot for a moment be measured by the affection of any earthly parent. It is ever, with him, the essential spirit and purpose of the Divine Being to seek and to save that which is lost. To the words *eternal* and *everlasting*, as he employs them with reference to the future retributions of the wicked, the most enlightened Biblical interpreters more and more agree in giving the sense or meaning of only an indefinitely prolonged continuance of time; as when, in other portions of the Bible, they are used to describe the protracted, but by no means never-ending, duration of the hills and mountains, or of the possession which the Israelites received, as they entered the land of Canaan. And not alone the properly understood language and drift of the writings of the Evangelists, but also the sublime promises and prospects by which the Epistles give character to the mighty future, — when an end is put to sin, and death is swallowed up in victory, and God shall be all in all, — necessitate the conviction that every being created in the Divine image shall at last be the heir of life and heaven. It were easy to wage a war of isolated and controverted texts. For every passage which you shall adduce in support of the doctrine of everlasting punishment, I will bring forward another that shall make it ineffectual to your purpose. We choose rather to find out the true spirit of Christ, and the general teaching of the New Testament; assured that here is given to us the surest revelation of the mind of God himself. That single parable of the prodigal son is, in itself alone, well-nigh enough to warrant the position we have taken, and to vindicate the views we hold so dear.

Liberal Christianity is a Christianity that recognizes the ceaseless development of the human soul, and the ever-

lasting progress of the race in truth, purity, love, power, and happiness. In the great life of sin and change, now or hereafter, the soul or the race may, for a time, be hindered or set back in its destined course; but it will only be to be carried forward again, at length, to the realization of some better hope. Mysterious as may seem the spiritual marches and countermarches of humanity, the end and purpose of them all, we believe, is victory and glory. God is in history and in providence, guiding and overruling all things to the universal good. There is nothing which he has created or permitted in his vast dominions that shall not attest his infinite and eternal love. The experience of sin, perhaps, will but give, by awful contrast, the needed meaning and beauty to the holiness of heaven. Out of the depths of earthly suffering the soul most truly rises to the heights of celestial rapture. Life derives a new significance and splendor from the great fact of death and decay. It is evil and pain and death together that will form the dark background of the ever-brightening picture of the immortal life, bringing out into more visible relief and glorious attractiveness the realizations which it portrays. A beautiful dream, if you will; but it is one that is not only in harmony with our best thought of God, the holiest longings of the soul, and the noblest interpretations of the Scriptures, but is the constantly growing faith of Christendom. The sects may profess to believe, and may try to think they believe, the doctrine of everlasting punishment; but they do not and cannot succeed. Ministers may firmly retain it in the creeds of the Churches; but most of them are afraid to preach it, and their audiences will not hear it. Parents who subscribe to it, reject it when their unconverted children die. It is a dogma out of which the life has departed for ever. There is not a single doctrine of the popular faith, beside, in regard to which there is such a



wide-spread, latent unbelief as exists in respect to this. Whatever men may say or subscribe to, their general daily life and conduct show, that the idea of the endless agony of all who die in their sins is one that has no hold upon their minds or hearts; and the retention of it, under such circumstances, in their articles of faith, and the persistent attempt which they make to persuade themselves that they accept it and credit it, when they inwardly know they do not and cannot, and when their constant spirit and manner attest so clearly their disbelief of it, seem to us like something that is essentially dishonest and pernicious. The world is coming to accept more cheering and ennobling views of providence and destiny. The best and brightest minds of the Church of to-day have discarded, or are discarding, the doctrine. The advanced thought of the philosophical and intellectual world disowns it. The truest tendencies of the age are away from it. Art no longer revels in the delineations of its awful horrors; and poetry finds no more its inspiration in its indescribable miseries, but breathes forth the pure hope and noble faith of humanity in some such strain as this of Tennyson, in whose "In Memoriam" are contained, says Robertson, "the most satisfactory things that have ever been said on the Future State:" —

"Oh, yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;  
  
That nothing walks with aimless feet;  
That not one life shall be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete;  
  
That not a worm is cloven in vain;  
That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,  
Or but subserves another's gain!



Behold! we know not any thing:  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last, — far off, — at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring."

The life of progress, of which I have spoken, is one that necessarily involves a life of action. Strange views have prevailed in the Christian world in regard to what constitutes the rest of heaven. Weary of the sicknesses and sufferings of the body, the temptations and conflicts of life, and the changes and uncertainties of the world around us, men have sighed for a sphere where all might be repose and permanence for ever; and have thought of heaven as a region into which they should enter, and be at once perfectly happy, undisturbed, and content, eternally hymning their songs and waving their palms. But this is not the rest of heaven. The rest of the soul, — what is it? It is, indeed, a sense of the divine favor; it is a consciousness of purity; it is a likeness to Christ, and oneness with God; it is harmony in its fullest, highest meaning. But it is something besides all this, and something upon which all this is conditioned, and with which it is for ever associated, — a wise and vigorous exercise of the powers and faculties of our God-given natures. Growth is a law of our being, and is dependent upon activity. Without work, struggle, and aspiration, we are not happy: we rust, and we retrograde. There is always a keen delight in putting forth our energies for some noble object or end; and it is thus that we inevitably develop into what is larger and better. The life of heaven, hereafter as now, is a life of constant, ceaseless exertion, while it must needs be free from the pain, fatigue, weariness, and discomforts which so often attend the exertion of the body here. It is because we always in our minds associate these with the idea of activity, that we so often indulge the hope that our future

state will be one of profound tranquillity and inertia. But these constitute no part of the inheritance of the blessed life that is to be. Unencumbered and unembarrassed by the ills of the flesh and the hinderances of its present material surroundings, the soul will there enjoy a freedom which it here has never known; and the very awakening and tension of its glorious, unfettered, and emancipated strength, will be to it a zest and joy more blissful far than the most favored condition of supine, ignoble security of which it can possibly conceive. It is thus, and thus alone, that the immortal spirit ascends, for ever and ever, nearer and still nearer to God, more and more comes to be like God, and loses itself deeper and deeper in God's bosom of immeasurable and eternal love.

Heaven, too, is a house of many mansions; a world of innumerable scattered circles and communities of happy residents; of endlessly different stages or degrees of intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress; of infinitely varied interests of life and departments of service, — where every good taste and talent can find their legitimate sphere of exercise and enjoyment, and nothing will ever be lost. Not in vain, not without some wise and beneficent purpose and end, has God created his children with such wondrously diversified powers and capacities; endowing each of us with peculiar gifts, and fitting us every one, by a discipline all our own, for a certain work and mission, which no one else is qualified so well to fulfil. For some distinct and definite object, God has made and fashioned us all; and it is for this that his providence is ordered to educate and discipline us. In every period of our earthly life, we are reminded how the heavenly Father has sought to prepare us for present duties and responsibilities by previous gifts, instructions, and guidance. The wise improvement of all that he vouchsafes or sends us, is the best possible prepara-

tion for any sphere or service to which we may be called. It is so in the life that now is: it will be so in the life that is to come. Life is a perpetual school; and all the lessons and influences that enter into it, or belong to it, have a vast and most momentous bearing upon life's great future. There, in the mighty world that lies before us, — so illimitable in extent, so varied in its interests, so complicated in its relations, so limitless in its opportunities, — there will be ample scope for every faculty and energy and attainment of which we may be the possessors. The wise shall continue yet to instruct, and the seeker still to explore. The benevolent shall find other objects of their disinterested care and love; and the strong and brave marshal and lead, as of yore, the ranks of the redeemed. The children of song will tune their voices in heaven to diviner music than they ever discoursed on earth, and the votaries of beauty will there discern more perfect visions of loveliness and grandeur than ever enchanted them here. The lips of eloquence shall be touched with a more celestial fire to speak of the wonders and glories of eternity; and the devotees of science shall enter into fresh and measureless realms of truth and knowledge, to discover and unveil their eternal laws and principles. And there, too, is the life of mutual helpfulness and disinterested service, each assisting the rest in every noble way, — the strong befriending the weak, the enlightened the ignorant, and the far-advanced and the well-experienced in the better world those who come fresh from the earthly shores; while fond affection and tender pity shall descend from the serener elevations of power and peace, to bear heavenly succor to the objects of their concern and love on the slopes or vales below: all combining, sympathizing, and working together to reach at length the distant summits above and beyond. Well does the venerable Dr. Beecher say, "Excepting exemption from sin,



intense, vigorous, untiring action is the greatest pleasure of the mind. I could hardly wish to enter heaven, did I believe its inhabitants were idly to sit by purling streams, fanned by balmy airs. Heaven, to be a place of happiness, must be a place of activity. Has the far-reaching mind of Newton ceased its profound investigations? Has David hung up his harp, as useless as the dusty arms in Westminster Abbey? Has Paul, glowing with God-like enthusiasm, ceased itinerating the universe of God? Are Peter and Cyprian and Edwards and Payson and Evarts idling away eternally in mere psalm-singing? Heaven is a place of restless activity, the abode of never-tiring thought. David and Isaiah will sweep nobler and loftier strains in eternity; and the minds of saints, unclogged by cumbersome clay, will for ever feast on the banquet of rich and glorious truth."

Without this prospect of constant and everlasting action, growth, and progress, of which I have spoken; without this hope on which I have dwelt, of the ultimate restoration and felicity of all who are created in the image of God,—life and providence would be a dark and awful enigma. There would be no sure relief to the soul; and work would lose its highest inspiration and joy. It is the blessed thought that every thing is moving resistlessly and unflinching on to such an unspeakably glorious consummation, and that all shall yet be well,—

"No wanderer lost,  
A family in heaven,"—

it is this that solves every dreadful problem, buoys us up in all our doubts and fears and sorrows, and gives a thrill of delight and an unwonted element of power to be and to do all that God requires. It is this that casts a cheerful aspect over all the ways and mysteries of the life that now is and of that which is to come, and makes us strong and



brave to go forward to meet whatever the years and ages and cycles of eternity may have in reserve for us. And it is this inspiring and uplifting doctrine which, it seems to me, constitutes a vital part of the Liberal faith which we profess, and which ought to be more strongly emphasized and more prominently set forth to view by us than it has been in the past. We are, as a denomination, false to our trust, recreant to our principles, unmindful of our opportunity, and heedless of the calls of Providence, if we fail to make known to men, as in all the sad, revolving centuries, it has never yet been understood, that God is an infinite Father, and that every soul he has made is sealed to glory honor, and immortality.

Be it ours, while moving amidst these shifting, shadowy things of earth, not to be unmindful of the world to which we go. Its stupendous, enduring realities; its exalted and saintly companionships; its rapturous greetings and everlasting re-unions; its inestimable privileges and infinite possibilities; its matchless splendors and overwhelming glories; its joy, its love, its praise, and its rest; God himself overarching, encircling, and filling all, and Christ leading his followers yet to living fountains of water, — it is these, and such as these, that invite us on, and that, while we are in the world, should lift us above its power and evil, that, when the hour of departure comes, we may go forth, with a strong and immortal trust, to realize in glad fruition what now is only the object of faith.

“ I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies.

And so, beside the silent sea,  
I wait the muffled oar:  
No harm from Him can come to me,  
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air:  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond his love and care.

O brothers! if my faith is vain,  
If hopes like these betray,  
Pray for me, that my feet may gain  
The sure and safer way.

And thou, O Lord! by whom are seen  
Thy creatures as they be,  
Forgive me if too close I lean  
My human heart on Thee."

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION  
BOSTON.



## DISCOURSE.

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### 1 THESSALONIANS V. 21.

**"PROVE ALL THINGS; HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD."**

THE peculiar circumstances of this occasion not only justify, but seem to demand, a departure from the course generally followed by preachers at the introduction of a brother into the sacred office. It is usual to speak of the nature, design, duties, and advantages of the Christian ministry; and on these topics I should now be happy to insist, did I not remember that a minister is to be given this day to a religious society, whose peculiarities of opinion have drawn upon them much remark, and, may I not add, much reproach. Many good minds, many sincere Christians, I am aware, are apprehensive that the solemnities of this day are to give a degree of influence to principles which they deem false and injurious. The fears and anxieties of such men I respect; and, believing that they are grounded in part on mistake, I have thought it my duty to lay before you, as clearly as I can, some of the distinguishing opinions of that class of Christians in our country who are known to sympathize with this religious society. I must ask your

patience, for such a subject is not to be despatched in a narrow compass. I must also ask you to remember, that it is impossible to exhibit, in a single discourse, our views of every doctrine of revelation, much less the differences of opinion which are known to subsist among ourselves. I shall confine myself to topics on which our sentiments have been misrepresented, or which distinguish us most widely from others. May I not hope to be heard with candor? God deliver us all from prejudice and unkindness, and fill us with the love of truth and virtue.

There are two natural divisions under which my thoughts will be arranged. I shall endeavour to unfold, 1st, The principles which we adopt in interpreting the Scriptures. And, 2dly, Some of the doctrines which the Scriptures, so interpreted, seem to us clearly to express.

I. We regard the Scriptures as the records of God's successive revelations to mankind, and particularly of the last and most perfect revelation of his will by Jesus Christ. Whatever doctrines seem to us to be clearly taught in the Scriptures, we receive without reserve or exception. We do not, however, attach equal importance to all the books in this collection. Our religion, we believe, lies chiefly in the New Testament. The dispensation of Moses, compared with that of Jesus, we consider as adapted to the childhood of the human race, a preparation for a nobler system, and chiefly useful now as serving to confirm and illustrate the Christian Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the only master of Christians, and whatever he taught, either during his personal ministry, or by his inspired apostles, we regard as of Divine authority, and profess to make the rule of our lives.



This authority which we give to the Scriptures is a reason, we conceive, for studying them with peculiar care, and for inquiring anxiously into the principles of interpretation by which their true meaning may be ascertained. The principles adopted by the class of Christians in whose name I speak need to be explained, because they are often misunderstood. We are particularly accused of making an unwarrantable use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture. We are said to exalt reason above revelation, to prefer our own wisdom to God's. Loose and undefined charges of this kind are circulated so freely, that we think it due to ourselves, and to the cause of truth, to express our views with some particularity.

Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. We believe that God, when he speaks to the human race, conforms, if we may so say, to the established rules of speaking and writing. How else would the Scriptures avail us more than if communicated in an unknown tongue?

Now all books, and all conversation, require in the reader or hearer the constant exercise of reason; or their true import is only to be obtained by continual comparison and inference. Human language, you well know, admits various interpretations; and every word and every sentence must be modified and explained according to the subject which is discussed, according to the purposes, feelings, circumstances, and principles of the writer, and according to the genius and idioms of the language which he uses. These are acknowledged principles in the interpretation of human

writings ; and a man, whose words we should explain without reference to these principles, would reproach us justly with a criminal want of candor, and an intention of obscuring or distorting his meaning.

Were the Bible written in a language and style of its own, did it consist of words which admit but a single sense, and of sentences wholly detached from each other, there would be no place for the principles now laid down. We could not reason about it, as about other writings. But such a book would be of little worth ; and perhaps, of all books, the Scriptures correspond least to this description. The word of God bears the stamp of the same hand which we see in his works. It has infinite connections and dependences. Every proposition is linked with others, and is to be compared with others, that its full and precise import may be understood. Nothing stands alone. The New Testament is built on the Old. The Christian dispensation is a continuation of the Jewish, the completion of a vast scheme of Providence, requiring great extent of view in the reader. Still more, the Bible treats of subjects on which we receive ideas from other sources besides itself ; such subjects as the nature, passions, relations, and duties of man ; and it expects us to restrain and modify its language by the known truths which observation and experience furnish on these topics.

We profess not to know a book which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible. In addition to the remarks now made on its infinite connections, we may observe, that its style nowhere affects the precision of science, or the accuracy of definition. Its language is singularly glowing, bold, and figurative, demanding more fre-

quent departures from the literal sense than that of our own age and country, and consequently demanding more continual exercise of judgment. We find, too, that the different portions of this book, instead of being confined to general truths, refer perpetually to the times when they were written, to states of society, to modes of thinking, to controversies in the Church, to feelings and usages, which have passed away, and without the knowledge of which we are constantly in danger of extending to all times and places what was of temporary and local application. We find, too, that some of these books are strongly marked by the genius and character of their respective writers, that the Holy Spirit did not so guide the Apostles as to suspend the peculiarities of their minds, and that a knowledge of their feelings, and of the influences under which they were placed, is one of the preparations for understanding their writings. With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually ; to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek in the nature of the subject, and the aim of the writer, his true meaning ; and, in general, to make use of what is known for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths.

Need I descend to particulars to prove that the Scriptures demand the exercise of reason? Take, for example, the style in which they generally speak of God, and observe how habitually they apply to him human passions and organs. Recollect the declarations of Christ, that he came, not to send peace, but a sword ; that unless we eat his flesh, and drink his blood, we have no life in us ; that we must hate father and mother, and pluck out the right eye ; and a

vast number of passages equally bold and unlimited. Recollect the unqualified manner in which it is said of Christians, that they possess all things, know all things, and can do all things. Recollect the verbal contradiction between Paul and James, and the apparent clashing of some parts of Paul's writings with the general doctrines and end of Christianity. I might extend the enumeration indefinitely; and who does not see that we must limit all these passages by the known attributes of God, of Jesus Christ, and of human nature, and by the circumstances under which they were written, so as to give the language a quite different import from what it would require had it been applied to different beings, or used in different connections?

Enough has been said to show in what sense we make use of reason in interpreting Scripture. From a variety of possible interpretations, we select that which accords with the nature of the subject and the state of the writer, with the connection of the passage, with the general strain of Scripture, with the known character and will of God, and with the obvious and acknowledged laws of nature. In other words, we believe that God never contradicts, in one part of Scripture, what he teaches in another; and never contradicts, in revelation, what he teaches in his works and providence. And we, therefore, distrust every interpretation which, after deliberate attention, seems repugnant to any established truth. We reason about the Bible precisely as civilians do about the constitution under which we live; who, you know, are accustomed to limit one provision of that venerable instrument by others, and to fix the precise import of its parts by inquiring into its general spirit, into the intentions of its authors, and into the prevalent feelings,



impressions, and circumstances of the time when it was framed. Without these principles of interpretation, we frankly acknowledge that we cannot defend the Divine authority of the Scriptures. Deny us this latitude, and we must abandon this book to its enemies.

We do not announce these principles as original or peculiar to ourselves. All Christians occasionally adopt them, not excepting those who most vehemently decry them when they happen to menace some favorite article of their creed. All Christians are compelled to use them in their controversies with infidels. All sects employ them in their warfare with one another. All willingly avail themselves of reason, when it can be pressed into the service of their own party, and only complain of it when its weapons wound themselves. None reason more frequently than those from whom we differ. It is astonishing what a fabric they rear from a few slight hints about the fall of our first parents; and how ingeniously they extract, from detached passages, mysterious doctrines about the Divine nature. We do not blame them for reasoning so abundantly, but for violating the fundamental rules of reasoning, for sacrificing the plain to the obscure, and the general strain of Scripture to a scanty number of insulated texts.

We object strongly to the contemptuous manner in which human reason is often spoken of by our adversaries, because it leads, we believe, to universal skepticism. If reason be so dreadfully darkened by the fall, that its most decisive judgments on religion are unworthy of trust, then Christianity, and even natural theology, must be abandoned; for the existence and veracity of God, and the Divine original of Christianity, are conclusions of reason, and must

stand or fall with it. If revelation be at war with this faculty, it subverts itself, for the great question of its truth is left by God to be decided at the bar of reason. It is worthy of remark, how nearly the bigot and the skeptic approach. Both would annihilate our confidence in our faculties, and both throw doubt and confusion over truth. We honor revelation too highly to make it the antagonist of reason, or to believe that it calls us to renounce our highest powers.

We indeed grant, that the use of reason in religion is accompanied with danger. But we ask any honest man to look on the history of the Church, and say, whether the renunciation of it be not still more dangerous. Besides, it is a plain fact, that men reason as erroneously on all subjects as on religion. Who does not know the wild and groundless theories which have been framed in physical and political science? But who ever supposed that we must cease to exercise reason on nature and society, because men have erred for ages in explaining them? We grant, that the passions continually, and sometimes fatally, disturb the rational faculty in its inquiries into revelation. The ambitious contrive to find doctrines in the Bible which favor their love of dominion. The timid and dejected discover there a gloomy system, and the mystical and fanatical, a visionary theology. The vicious can find examples or assertions on which to build the hope of a late repentance, or of acceptance on easy terms. The falsely refined contrive to light on doctrines which have not been soiled by vulgar handling. But the passions do not distract the reason in religious, any more than in any other inquiries, which excite strong and general interest; and this faculty,

of consequence, is not to be renounced in religion, unless we are prepared to discard it universally. The true inference from the almost endless errors which have darkened theology is, not that we are to neglect and disparage our powers, but to exert them more patiently, circumspectly, uprightly. The worst errors, after all, have sprung up in that church which proscribes reason, and demands from its members implicit faith. The most pernicious doctrines have been the growth of the darkest times, when the general credulity encouraged bad men and enthusiasts to broach their dreams and inventions, and to stifle the faint remonstrances of reason by the menaces of everlasting perdition. Say what we may, God has given us a rational nature, and will call us to account for it. We may let it sleep, but we do so at our peril. Revelation is addressed to us as rational beings. We may wish, in our sloth, that God had given us a system, demanding no labor of comparing, limiting, and inferring. But such a system would be at variance with the whole character of our present existence ; and it is the part of wisdom to take revelation as it is given to us, and to interpret it by the help of the faculties which it everywhere supposes, and on which it is founded.

To the views now given, an objection is commonly urged from the character of God. We are told, that, God being infinitely wiser than men, his discoveries will surpass human reason. In a revelation from such a teacher, we ought to expect propositions which we cannot reconcile with one another, and which may seem to contradict established truths ; and it becomes us not to question or explain them away, but to believe and adore, and to submit our weak and carnal reason to the Divine word. To this objection,

we have two short answers. We say, first, that it is impossible that a teacher of infinite wisdom should expose those whom he would teach to infinite error. But if once we admit that propositions, which in their literal sense appear plainly repugnant to one another, or to any known truth, are still to be literally understood and received, what possible limit can we set to the belief of contradictions? What shelter have we from the wildest fanaticism, which can always quote passages that, in their literal and obvious sense, give support to its extravagances? How can the Protestant escape from transubstantiation, a doctrine most clearly taught us, if the submission of reason now contended for be a duty? How can we even hold fast the truths of revelation? for if one apparent contradiction may be true, so may another, and the proposition, that Christianity is false, though involving inconsistency, may still be a verity.

We answer, again, that, if God be infinitely wise, he cannot sport with the understandings of his creatures. A wise teacher discovers his wisdom in adapting himself to the capacities of his pupils, not in perplexing them with what is unintelligible, not in distressing them with apparent contradictions, not in filling them with a skeptical distrust of their own powers. An infinitely wise teacher, who knows the precise extent of our minds, and the best method of enlightening them, will surpass all other instructors in bringing down truth to our apprehension, and in showing its loveliness and harmony. We ought, indeed, to expect occasional obscurity in such a book as the Bible, which was written for past and future ages, as well as for the present. But God's wisdom is a pledge, that whatever is necessary



for us, and necessary for salvation, is revealed too plainly to be mistaken, and too consistently to be questioned, by a sound and upright mind. It is not the mark of wisdom to use an unintelligible phraseology, to communicate what is above our capacities, to confuse and unsettle the intellect by appearances of contradiction. We honor our heavenly teacher too much to ascribe to him such a revelation. A revelation is a gift of light. It cannot thicken our darkness, and multiply our perplexities.

II. Having thus stated the principles according to which we interpret Scripture, I now proceed to the second great head of this discourse, which is, to state some of the views which we derive from that sacred book, particularly those which distinguish us from other Christians.

1. In the first place, we believe in the doctrine of God's UNITY, or that there is one God, and one only. To this truth we give infinite importance, and we feel ourselves bound to take heed, lest any man spoil us of it by vain philosophy. The proposition, that there is one God, seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it, that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive, that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hairbreadth distinctions between being and person which the sagacity of latter ages has discovered. We find no intimation, that this language was to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings.

We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect, the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. They perform different parts in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator, and not the Father. The Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousnesses, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed. It is difference of properties, and acts, and consciousness, which leads us to the belief of different intelligent beings, and if this mark fails us, our whole knowledge falls; we have no proof, that all the agents and persons in the universe are not one and the same mind. When we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents, distinguished from each other by similar marks and peculiarities to those which separate the persons of the Trinity; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing with each other, loving each other, and performing different acts, how can they help regarding them as different beings, different minds?

We do, then, with all earnestness, though without reproaching our brethren, protest against the irrational and unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. "To us," as to the Apostle and the primitive Christians, "there is one God, even the Father." With Jesus, we worship the Father, as the only living and true God. We are astonished, that any man can read the New Testament, and avoid the conviction, that the Father alone is God. We hear our Saviour continually appropriating this character to the Father. We find the Father continually distinguished from Jesus by this title. "God sent his Son." "God anointed Jesus." Now, how singular and inexplicable is this phraseology, which fills the New Testament, if this title belong equally to Jesus, and if a principal object of this book is to reveal him as God, as partaking equally with the Father in supreme divinity! We challenge our opponents to adduce one passage in the New Testament where the word God means three persons, where it is not limited to one person, and where, unless turned from its usual sense by the connection it does not mean the Father. Can stronger proof be given that the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead is not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity?

This doctrine, were it true, must, from its difficulty, singularity, and importance, have been laid down with great clearness, guarded with great care, and stated with all possible precision. But where does this statement appear? From the many passages which treat of God, we ask for one, one only, in which we are told that he is a threefold being, or that he is three persons, or that he is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. On the contrary, in the New Testament, where, at least, we might expect many express assertions



of this nature, God is declared to be one, without the least attempt to prevent the acceptation of the words in their common sense; and he is always spoken of and addressed in the singular number, that is, in language which was universally understood to intend a single person, and to which no other idea could have been attached, without an express admonition. So entirely do the Scriptures abstain from stating the Trinity, that, when our opponents would insert it into their creeds and doxologies, they are compelled to leave the Bible, and to invent forms of words altogether unsanctioned by Scriptural phraseology. That a doctrine so strange, so liable to misapprehension, so fundamental as this is said to be, and requiring such careful exposition, should be left so undefined and unprotected, to be made out by inference, and to be hunted through distant and detached parts of Scripture,—this is a difficulty which, we think, no ingenuity can explain.

We have another difficulty. Christianity, it must be remembered, was planted and grew up amidst sharp-sighted enemies, who overlooked no objectionable part of the system, and who must have fastened with great earnestness on a doctrine involving such apparent contradictions as the Trinity. We cannot conceive an opinion, against which the Jews, who prided themselves on an adherence to God's unity, would have raised an equal clamor. Now, how happens it that in the Apostolic writings, which relate so much to objections against Christianity, and to the controversies which grew out of this religion, not one word is said implying that objections were brought against the Gospel from the doctrine of the Trinity, not one word is uttered in its defence and explanation, not a word to rescue it from re-



proach and mistake? This argument has almost the force of demonstration. We are persuaded, that, had three divine persons been announced by the first preachers of Christianity, all equal and all infinite, one of whom was the very Jesus who had lately died on a cross, this peculiarity of Christianity would have almost absorbed every other, and the great labor of the Apostles would have been to repel the continual assaults which it would have awakened. But the fact is, that not a whisper of objection to Christianity, on that account, reaches our ears from the Apostolic age. In the Epistles we see not a trace of controversy called forth by the Trinity.

We have further objections to this doctrine, drawn from its practical influence. We regard it as unfavorable to devotion, by dividing and distracting the mind in its communion with God. It is a great excellence of the doctrine of God's unity, that it offers to us ONE OBJECT of supreme homage, adoration, and love, one Infinite Father, one Being of beings, one original and fountain, to whom we may refer all good, in whom all our powers and affections may be concentrated, and whose lovely and venerable nature may pervade all our thoughts. True piety, when directed to an undivided Deity, has a chasteness, a singleness, most favorable to religious awe and love. Now the Trinity sets before us three distinct objects of supreme adoration; three infinite persons, having equal claims on our hearts; three divine agents, performing different offices, and to be acknowledged and worshipped in different relations. And is it possible we ask, that the weak and limited mind of man can attach itself to these with the same power and joy as to one Infinite Father, the only First Cause, in whom all the bless-

ings of nature and redemption meet as their centre and source? Must not devotion be distracted by the equal and rival claims of three equal persons, and must not the worship of the conscientious, consistent Christian be disturbed by an apprehension, lest he withhold from one or another of these his due proportion of homage?

We also think, that the doctrine of the Trinity injures devotion, not only by joining to the Father other objects of worship, but by taking from the Father the supreme affection which is his due, and transferring it to the Son. This is a most important view. That Jesus Christ, if exalted into the infinite Divinity, should be more interesting than the Father, is precisely what might be expected from history, and from the principles of human nature. Men want an object of worship like themselves, and the great secret of idolatry lies in this propensity. A God, clothed in our form, and feeling our wants and sorrows, speaks to our weak nature more strongly than a Father in heaven, a pure spirit, invisible, and unapproachable, save by the reflecting and purified mind. — We think, too, that the peculiar offices ascribed to Jesus by the popular theology make him the most attractive person in the Godhead. The Father is the depositary of the justice, the vindicator of the rights, the avenger of the laws, of the Divinity. On the other hand, the Son, the brightness of the Divine mercy, stands between the incensed Deity and guilty humanity, exposes his meek head to the storms, and his compassionate breast to the sword of the Divine justice, bears our whole load of punishment, and purchases with his blood every blessing which descends from heaven. Need we state the effect of these representations, especially on common minds for whom

Christianity was chiefly designed, and whom it seeks to bring to the Father as the loveliest being? We do believe, that the worship of a bleeding, suffering God tends strongly to absorb the mind, and to draw it from other objects, just as the human tenderness of the Virgin Mary has given her so conspicuous a place in the devotions of the Church of Rome. We believe, too, that this worship, though attractive, is not most fitted to spiritualize the mind, that it awakens human transport rather than that deep veneration of the moral perfections of God which is the essence of piety.

2. Having thus given our views of the unity of God, I proceed in the second place to observe, that we believe in the unity of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is one mind, one soul, one being, as truly one as we are, and equally distinct from the one God. We complain of the doctrine of the Trinity, that, not satisfied with making God three beings, it makes Jesus Christ two beings, and thus introduces infinite confusion into our conceptions of his character. This corruption of Christianity, alike repugnant to common sense and to the general strain of Scripture, is a remarkable proof of the power of a false philosophy in disfiguring the simple truth of Jesus.

According to this doctrine, Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one conscious intelligent principle, whom we can understand, consists of two souls, two minds; the one divine, the other human; the one weak, the other almighty; the one ignorant, the other omniscient. Now we maintain, that this is to make Christ two beings. To denominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose him made up of two minds, infinitely different from each other, is to abuse



and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these two minds in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its own perceptions. They have in fact no common properties. The divine mind feels none of the wants and sorrows of the human, and the human is infinitely removed from the perfection and happiness of the divine. Can you conceive of two beings in the universe more distinct? We have always thought that one person was constituted and distinguished by one consciousness. The doctrine, that one and the same person should have two consciousnesses, two wills, two souls, infinitely different from each other, — this we think an enormous tax on human credulity.

We say, that if a doctrine so strange, so difficult, so remote from all the previous conceptions of men, be indeed a part and an essential part of revelation, it must be taught with great distinctness, and we ask our brethren to point to some plain, direct passage, where Christ is said to be composed of two minds infinitely different, yet constituting one person. We find none. Other Christians, indeed, tell us, that this doctrine is necessary to the harmony of the Scriptures; that some texts ascribe to Jesus Christ human, and others divine properties, and that to reconcile these we must suppose two minds to which these properties may be referred. In other words, for the purpose of reconciling certain difficult passages, which a just criticism can in a great degree, if not wholly, explain, we must invent an hypothesis vastly more difficult, and involving gross absurdity. We are to find our way out of a labyrinth by a clue which conducts us into mazes infinitely more inextricable.



Surely, if Jesus Christ felt that he consisted of two minds, and that this was a leading feature of his religion, his phraseology respecting himself would have been colored by this peculiarity. The universal language of men is framed upon the idea, that one person is one person, is one mind, and one soul ; and when the multitude heard this language from the lips of Jesus, they must have taken it in its usual sense, and must have referred to a single soul all which he spoke, unless expressly instructed to interpret it differently. But where do we find this instruction? Where do you meet, in the New Testament, the phraseology which abounds in Trinitarian books, and which necessarily grows from the doctrine of two natures in Jesus? Where does this divine teacher say, "This I speak as God, and this as man; this is true only of my human mind, this only of my divine"? Where do we find in the Epistles a trace of this strange phraseology? Nowhere. It was not needed in that day. It was demanded by the errors of a later age.

We believe, then, that Christ is one mind, one being, and, I add, a being distinct from the one God. That Christ is not the one God, not the same being with the Father, is a necessary inference from our former head, in which we saw that the doctrine of three persons in God is a fiction. But on so important a subject I would add a few remarks. We wish that those from whom we differ would weigh one striking fact. Jesus, in his preaching, continually spoke of God. The word was always in his mouth. We ask, does he, by this word, ever mean himself? We say, never. On the contrary, he most plainly distinguishes between God and himself, and so do his disciples. How this is to be reconciled with the idea, that the manifestation of Christ, as

God, was a primary object of Christianity, our adversaries must determine.

If we examine the passages in which Jesus is distinguished from God, we shall see that they not only speak of him as another being, but seem to labor to express his inferiority. He is continually spoken of as the Son of God, sent of God, receiving all his powers from God, working miracles because God was with him, judging justly because God taught him, having claims on our belief because he was anointed and sealed by God, and as able of himself to do nothing. The New Testament is filled with this language. Now we ask what impression this language was fitted and intended to make. Could any who heard it have imagined, that Jesus was the very God to whom he was so industriously declared to be inferior,—the very being by whom he was sent, and from whom he professed to have received his message and power? Let it here be remembered, that the human birth, and bodily form, and humble circumstances, and mortal sufferings of Jesus must all have prepared men to interpret, in the most unqualified manner, the language in which his inferiority to God was declared. Why, then, was this language used so continually, and without limitation, if Jesus were the Supreme Deity, and if this truth were an essential part of his religion? I repeat it, the human condition and sufferings of Christ tended strongly to exclude from men's minds the idea of his proper Godhead; and, of course, we should expect to find in the New Testament perpetual care and effort to counteract this tendency, to hold him forth as the same being with his Father, if this doctrine were, as is pretended, the soul and centre of his religion. We should expect to find the phraseology of

Scripture cast into the mould of this doctrine, to hear familiarly of God the Son, of our Lord God Jesus; and to be told, that to us there is one God, even Jesus. But instead of this, the inferiority of Christ pervades the New Testament. It is not only implied in the general phraseology, but repeatedly and decidedly expressed, and unaccompanied with any admonition to prevent its application to his whole nature. Could it, then, have been the great design of the sacred writers to exhibit Jesus as the Supreme God?

I am aware that these remarks will be met by two or three texts in which Christ is called God, and by a class of passages, not very numerous, in which divine properties are said to be ascribed to him. To these we offer one plain answer. We say that it is one of the most established and obvious principles of criticism, that language is to be explained according to the known properties of the subject to which it is applied. Every man knows that the same words convey very different ideas, when used in relation to different beings. Thus Solomon *built* the temple in a different manner from the architect whom he employed; and God *repents* differently from man. Now we maintain, that the known properties and circumstances of Christ, his birth, sufferings, and death, his constant habit of speaking of God as a distinct being from himself, his praying to God, his ascribing to God all his power and offices, — these acknowledged properties of Christ, we say, oblige us to interpret the comparatively few passages which are thought to make him the Supreme God in a manner consistent with his distinct and inferior nature. It is our duty to explain such texts by the rule which we apply to other texts, in which



human beings are called gods, and are said to be partakers of the Divine nature, to know and possess all things, and to be filled with all God's fulness. These latter passages we do not hesitate to modify, and restrain, and turn from the most obvious sense, because this sense is opposed to the known properties of the beings to whom they relate; and we maintain, that we adhere to the same principle, and use no greater latitude, in explaining as we do the passages which are thought to support the Godhead of Christ.

Trinitarians profess to derive some important advantages from their mode of viewing Christ. It furnishes them, they tell us, with an infinite atonement, for it shows them an infinite being suffering for their sins. The confidence with which this fallacy is repeated astonishes us. When pressed with the question, whether they really believe that the infinite and unchangeable God suffered and died on the cross, they acknowledge that this is not true, but that Christ's human mind alone retained the pains of death. How have we, then, an infinite sufferer? This language seems to us an imposition on common minds, and very derogatory to God's justice, as if this attribute could be satisfied by a sophism and a fiction.

We are also told, that Christ is a more interesting object, that his love and mercy are more felt, when he is viewed as the Supreme God, who left his glory to take humanity and to suffer for men. That Trinitarians are strongly moved by this representation, we do not mean to deny; but we think their emotions altogether founded on a misapprehension of their own doctrines. They talk of the second person of the Trinity's leaving his glory and his Father's bosom, to visit and save the world. But this second person



being the unchangeable and infinite God, was evidently incapable of parting with the least degree of his perfection and felicity. At the moment of his taking flesh, he was as intimately present with his Father as before, and equally with his Father filled heaven, and earth, and immensity. This Trinitarians acknowledge; and still they profess to be touched and overwhelmed by the amazing humiliation of this immutable being! But not only does their doctrine, when fully explained, reduce Christ's humiliation to a fiction, it almost wholly destroys the impressions with which his cross ought to be viewed. According to their doctrine, Christ was, comparatively, no sufferer at all. It is true, his human mind suffered; but this, they tell us, was an infinitely small part of Jesus, bearing no more proportion to his whole nature, than a single hair of our heads to the whole body, or than a drop to the ocean. The divine mind of Christ, and which was most properly himself, was infinitely happy, as the very moment of the suffering of his humanity. Whilst hanging on the cross, he was the happiest being in the universe,—as happy as the infinite Father; so that his pains, compared with his felicity, were nothing. This Trinitarians do and must acknowledge. It follows necessarily from the immutableness of the divine nature which they ascribe to Christ; so that their system, justly viewed, robs his death of interest, weakens our sympathy with his sufferings, and is, of all others, most unfavorable to a love of Christ, founded on a sense of his sacrifices for mankind. We esteem our own views to be vastly more affecting. It is our belief, that Christ's humiliation was real and entire; that the whole Saviour, and not a part of him, suffered; that his crucifixion was a scene of deep and unmixed agony. As

we stand round his cross, our minds are not distracted, nor our sensibility weakened, by contemplating him as composed of incongruous and infinitely differing minds, and as having a balance of infinite felicity. We recognize in the dying Jesus but one mind. This, we think, renders his sufferings, and his patience and love in bearing them, incomparably more impressive and affecting, than the system we oppose.

3. Having thus given our belief on two great points, namely, that there is one God, and that Jesus Christ is a being distinct from and inferior to God, I now proceed to another point on which we lay still greater stress. We believe in the *moral perfection of God*. We consider no part of theology so important as that which treats of God's moral character; and we value our views of Christianity chiefly as they assert his amiable and venerable attributes.

It may be said, that, in regard to this subject, all Christians agree; that all ascribe to the Supreme Being infinite justice, goodness, and holiness. We reply, that it is very possible to speak of God magnificently, and to think of him meanly; to apply to his person high-sounding epithets, and to his government principles which make him odious. The heathens called Jupiter the greatest and the best; but his history was black with cruelty and lust. We cannot judge of men's real ideas of God by their general language, for in all ages they have hoped to soothe the Deity by adulation. We must inquire into their particular views of his purposes, of the principles of his administration, and of his disposition towards his creatures.

We conceive that Christians have generally leaned towards a very injurious view of the Supreme Being. They

have too often felt as if he were raised, by his greatness and sovereignty, above the principles of morality, above those eternal laws of equity and rectitude to which all other beings are subjected. We believe, that in no being is the sense of right so strong, so omnipotent, as in God. We believe that his almighty power is entirely submitted to his perceptions of rectitude; and this is the ground of our piety. It is not because he is our Creator merely, but because he created us for good and holy purposes; it is not because his will is irresistible, but because his will is the perfection of virtue, that we pay him allegiance. We cannot bow before a being, however great and powerful, who governs tyrannically. We respect nothing but excellence, whether on earth or in heaven. We venerate, not the loftiness of God's throne, but the equity and goodness in which it is established.

We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, benevolent, in the proper sense of these words; good in disposition, as well as in act; good, not to a few, but to all; good to every individual, as well as to the general system.

We believe, too, that God is just; but we never forget that his justice is the justice of a good being, dwelling in the same mind, and acting in harmony with perfect benevolence. By this attribute, we understand God's infinite regard to virtue or moral worth, expressed in a moral government; that is, in giving excellent and equitable laws, and in conferring such rewards, and inflicting such punishments, as are best fitted to secure their observance. God's justice has for its end the highest virtue of the creation, and it punishes for this end alone, and thus it coincides with be-

nevolence ; for virtue and happiness, though not the same, are inseparably conjoined.

God's justice, thus viewed, appears to us to be in perfect harmony with his mercy. According to the prevalent systems of theology, these attributes are so discordant and jarring, that to reconcile them is the hardest task, and the most wonderful achievement, of infinite wisdom. To us they seem to be intimate friends, always at peace, breathing the same spirit, and seeking the same end. By God's mercy, we understand not a blind, instinctive compassion, which forgives without reflection, and without regard to the interests of virtue. This, we acknowledge, would be incompatible with justice, and also with enlightened benevolence. God's mercy, as we understand it, desires strongly the happiness of the guilty, but only through their penitence. It has a regard to character as truly as his justice. It defers punishment, and suffers long, that the sinner may return to his duty, but leaves the impenitent and unyielding to the fearful retribution threatened in God's word.

To give our views of God in one word, we believe in his Parental character. We ascribe to him, not only the name, but the dispositions and principles of a father. We believe that he has a father's concern for his creatures, a father's desire for their improvement, a father's equity in proportioning his commands to their powers, a father's joy in their progress, a father's readiness to receive the penitent, and a father's justice for the incorrigible. We look upon this world as a place of education, in which he is training men by prosperity and adversity, by aids and obstructions, by conflicts of reason and passion, by motives to duty and



temptations to sin, by a various discipline suited to free and moral beings, for union with himself, and for a sublime and ever growing virtue in heaven.

Now we object to the systems of religion which prevail among us, that they are adverse, in a greater or less degree, to these purifying, comforting, and honorable views of God. that they take from us our father in heaven, and substitute for him a being, whom we cannot love if we would, and whom we ought not to love if we could. We object particularly, on this ground, to that system which arrogates to itself the name of Orthodoxy, and which is now industriously propagated through our country. This system, indeed, takes various shapes, but in all it casts dishonor on the Creator. According to its old and genuine form, it teaches that God brings us into life wholly depraved, so that under the innocent features of our childhood is hidden a nature averse to all good, and propense to all evil, a nature which exposes us to God's displeasure and wrath, even before we have acquired power to understand our duties, or to reflect upon our actions. According to a more modern exposition, it teaches that we came from the hands of our Maker with such a constitution, and are placed under such influences and circumstances, as to render certain and infallible the total depravity of every human being, from the first moment of his moral agency; and it also teaches, that the offence of the child, who brings into life this ceaseless tendency to unmingled crime, exposes him to the sentence of everlasting damnation. Now, according to the plainest principles of morality, we maintain, that a natural constitution of the mind, unfailingly disposing it to evil and to evil alone, would absolve it from guilt; that to give existence under

this condition would argue unspeakable cruelty, and that to punish the sin of this unhappily constituted child with endless ruin would be a wrong unparalleled by the most merciless despotism.

This system also teaches, that God selects from this corrupt mass a number to be saved, and plucks them, by a special influence, from the common ruin; that the rest of mankind, though left without that special grace which their conversion requires, are commanded to repent under penalty of aggravated woe; and that forgiveness is promised them on terms which their very constitution infallibly disposes them to reject, and in rejecting which they awfully enhance the punishments of hell. These proffers of forgiveness and exhortations of amendment, to beings born under a blighting curse, fill our minds with a horror which we want words to express.

That this religious system does not produce all the effects on character which might be anticipated, we most joyfully admit. It is often, very often, counteracted by nature, conscience, common sense, by the general strain of Scripture, by the mild example and precepts of Christ, and by the many positive declarations of God's universal kindness and perfect equity. But still we think that we see its unhappy influence. It tends to discourage the timid, to give excuses to the bad, to feed the vanity of the fanatical, and to offer shelter to the bad feelings of the malignant. By shocking, as it does, the fundamental principles of morality, and by exhibiting a severe and partial Deity, it tends strongly to pervert the moral faculty, to form a gloomy, forbidding, and servile religion, and to lead men to substitute censoriousness, bitterness, and persecution for a tender and impartial!

charity. We think, too, that this system, which begins with degrading human nature, may be expected to end in pride ; for pride grows out of a consciousness of high distinctions, however obtained, and no distinction is so great as that which is made between the elected and abandoned of God.

The false and dishonorable views of God which have now been stated, we feel ourselves bound to resist unceasingly. Other errors we can pass over with comparative indifference. But we ask our opponents to leave to us a God worthy of our love and trust, in whom our moral sentiments may delight, in whom our weaknesses and sorrows may find refuge. We cling to the Divine perfections. - We meet them everywhere in creation, we read them in the Scriptures, we see a lovely image of them in Jesus Christ ; and gratitude, love, and veneration call on us to assert them. Reproached, as we often are, by men, it is our consolation and happiness, that one of our chief offences is the zeal with which we vindicate the dishonored goodness and rectitude of God.

4. Having thus spoken of the unity of God ; of the unity of Jesus, and his inferiority to God ; and of the perfections of the Divine character ; I now proceed to give our views of the mediation of Christ and of the purposes of his mission. With regard to the great object which Jesus came to accomplish, there seems to be no possibility of mistake. We believe that he was sent by the Father to effect a moral or spiritual deliverance of mankind ; that is, to rescue men from sin and its consequences, and to bring them to a state of everlasting purity and happiness. We believe, too, that he accomplishes this sublime purpose by



a variety of methods ; by his instructions respecting God's unity, parental character, and moral government, which are admirably fitted to reclaim the world from idolatry and impiety to the knowledge, love, and obedience of the Creator ; by his promises of pardon to the penitent, and of Divine assistance to those who labor for progress in moral excellence ; by the light which he has thrown on the path of duty ; by his own spotless example, in which the loveliness and sublimity of virtue shine forth to warm and quicken, as well as guide us to perfection ; by his threatenings against incorrigible guilt ; by his glorious discoveries of immortality ; by his sufferings and death ; by that signal event, the resurrection, which powerfully bore witness to his Divine mission, and brought down to men's senses a future life ; by his continual intercession, which obtains for us spiritual aid and blessings ; and by the power with which he is invested, of raising the dead, judging the world, and conferring the everlasting rewards promised to the faithful.

We have no desire to conceal the fact, that a difference of opinion exists among us in regard to an interesting part of Christ's mediation ; I mean, in regard to the precise influence of his death on our forgiveness. Many suppose that this event contributes to our pardon, as it was a principal means of confirming his religion, and of giving it a power over the mind ; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed. Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death with an emphasis so peculiar, that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in



removing punishment, though the Scriptures may not reveal the way in which it contributes to this end.

Whilst, however, we differ in explaining the connection between Christ's death and human forgiveness, — a connection which we all gratefully acknowledge, — we agree in rejecting many sentiments which prevail in regard to his mediation. The idea which is conveyed to common minds by the popular system, that Christ's death has an influence in making God placable or merciful, in awakening his kindness towards men, we reject with strong disapprobation. We are happy to find, that this very dishonorable notion is disowned by intelligent Christians of that class from which we differ. We recollect, however, that not long ago it was common to hear of Christ as having died to appease God's wrath, and to pay the debt of sinners to his inflexible justice; and we have a strong persuasion, that the language of popular religious books, and the common mode of stating the doctrine of Christ's mediation, still communicate very degrading views of God's character. They give to multitudes the impression, that the death of Jesus produces a change in the mind of God towards man, and that in this its efficacy chiefly consists. No error seems to us more pernicious. We can endure no shade over the pure goodness of God. We earnestly maintain, that Jesus, instead of calling forth in any way or degree the mercy of the Father, was sent by that mercy, to be our Saviour; that he is nothing to the human race but what he is by God's appointment; that he communicates nothing but what God empowers him to bestow; that our Father in heaven is originally, essentially, and eternally placable, and disposed to forgive; and that his unborrowed, underived, and unchangeable love is the only

fountain of what flows to us through his Son. We conceive that Jesus is dishonored, not glorified, by ascribing to him an influence which clouds the splendor of Divine benevolence.

We farther agree in rejecting, as unscriptural and absurd, the explanation given by the popular system of the manner in which Christ's death procures forgiveness for men. This system used to teach, as its fundamental principle, that man, having sinned against an infinite being, has contracted infinite guilt, and is consequently exposed to an infinite penalty. We believe, however, that this reasoning, if reasoning it may be called, which overlooks the obvious maxim, that the guilt of a being must be proportioned to his nature and powers, has fallen into disuse. Still the system teaches that sin, of whatever degree, exposes to endless punishment, and that the whole human race, being infallibly involved by their nature in sin, owe this awful penalty to the justice of their Creator. It teaches, that this penalty cannot be remitted, in consistency with the honor of the Divine law, unless a substitute be found to endure it or to suffer an equivalent. It also teaches, that, from the nature of the case, no substitute is adequate to this work, save the infinite God himself; and accordingly, God, in his second person, took on him human nature, that he might pay to his own justice the debt of punishment incurred by men, and might thus reconcile forgiveness with the claims and threatenings of his law. Such is the prevalent system. Now, to us, this doctrine seems to carry on its front strong marks of absurdity, and we maintain that Christianity ought not to be encumbered with it, unless it be laid down in the New Testament fully and expressly. We ask our adversaries, then,

to point to some plain passages where it is taught. We ask for one text in which we are told that God took human nature, that he might make an infinite satisfaction to his own justice; for one text which tells us that human guilt requires an infinite substitute, that Christ's sufferings owe their efficacy to their being borne by an infinite being, or that his divine nature gives infinite value to the sufferings of the human. Not *one word* of this description can we find in the Scriptures; not a text, which even hints at these strange doctrines. They are altogether, we believe, the fictions of theologians. Christianity is in no degree responsible for them. We are astonished at their prevalence. What can be plainer, than that God cannot, in any sense, be a sufferer, or bear a penalty in the room of his creatures? How dishonorable to him is the supposition, that his justice is now so severe as to exact infinite punishment for the sins of frail and feeble men, and now so easy and yielding as to accept the limited pains of Christ's human soul as a full equivalent for the endless woes due from the world! How plain is it, also, according to this doctrine, that God, instead of being plenteous in forgiveness, never forgives! for it seems absurd to speak of men as forgiven, when their whole punishment, or an equivalent to it, is borne by a substitute. A scheme more fitted to obscure the brightness of Christianity and the mercy of God, or less suited to give comfort to a guilty and troubled mind, could not, we think, be easily framed.

We believe, too, that this system is unfavorable to the character. It naturally leads men to think that Christ came to change God's mind, rather than their own; that



the highest object of his mission was to avert punishment, rather than to communicate holiness; and that a large part of religion consists in disparaging good works and human virtue, for the purpose of magnifying the value of Christ's vicarious sufferings. In this way a sense of the infinite importance and indispensable necessity of personal improvement is weakened, and high-sounding praises of Christ's cross seem often to be substituted for obedience to his precepts. For ourselves, we have not so learned Jesus. Whilst we gratefully acknowledge that he came to rescue us from punishment, we believe that he was sent on a still nobler errand, namely, to deliver us from sin itself, and to form us to a sublime and heavenly virtue. We regard him as a Saviour, chiefly as he is the light, physician, and guide of the dark, diseased, and wandering mind. No influence in the universe seems to us so glorious as that over the character; and no redemption so worthy of thankfulness, as the restoration of the soul to purity. Without this, pardon, were it possible, would be of little value. Why pluck the sinner from hell, if a hell be left to burn in his own breast? Why raise him to heaven, if he remain a stranger to its sanctity and love? With these impressions, we are accustomed to value the Gospel chiefly as it abounds in effectual aids, motives, excitements, to a generous and divine virtue. In this virtue, as in a common centre, we see all its doctrines, precepts, promises, meet; and we believe that faith in this religion is of no worth, and contributes nothing to salvation, any farther than as it uses these doctrines, precepts, promises, and the whole life, character, sufferings, and triumphs of Jesus, as the means of purify



ing the mind, of changing it into the likeness of his celestial excellence.

5. Having thus stated our views of the highest object of Christ's mission, that it is the recovery of men to virtue, or holiness, I shall now, in the last place, give our views of the nature of Christian virtue, or true holiness. We believe that all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man, that is, in conscience, or his sense of duty, and in the power of forming his temper and life according to conscience. We believe that these moral faculties are the grounds of responsibility, and the highest distinctions of human nature, and that no act is praiseworthy any farther than it springs from their exertion. We believe that no dispositions infused into us without our own moral activity are of the nature of virtue, and therefore we reject the doctrine of irresistible Divine influence on the human mind, moulding it into goodness, as marble is hewn into a statue. Such goodness, if this word may be used, would not be the object of moral approbation, any more than the instinctive affections of inferior animals, or the constitutional amiableness of human beings.

By these remarks, we do not mean to deny the importance of God's aid or Spirit; but by his Spirit we mean a moral, illuminating, and persuasive influence, not physical, not compulsory, not involving a necessity of virtue. We object strongly to the idea of many Christians respecting man's impotence and God's irresistible agency on the heart, believing that they subvert our responsibility and the laws of our moral nature, that they make men machines, that they cast on God the blame of all evil

deeds, that they discourage good minds, and inflate the fanatical with wild conceits of immediate and sensible inspiration.

Among the virtues, we give the first place to the love of God. We believe, that this principle is the true end and happiness of our being, that we were made for union with our Creator, that his infinite perfection is the only sufficient object and true resting-place for the insatiable desires and unlimited capacities of the human mind, and that without him our noblest sentiments—admiration, veneration, hope, and love—would wither and decay. We believe, too, that the love of God is not only essential to happiness, but to the strength and perfection of all the virtues; that conscience, without the sanction of God's authority and retributive justice, would be a weak director; that benevolence, unless nourished by communion with his goodness, and encouraged by his smile, could not thrive amidst the selfishness and thanklessness of the world; and that self-government, without a sense of the Divine inspection, would hardly extend beyond an outward and partial purity. God, as he is essentially goodness, holiness, justice, and virtue, so he is the life, motive, and sustainer of virtue in the human soul.

But whilst we earnestly inculcate the love of God, we believe that great care is necessary to distinguish it from counterfeits. We think that much, which is called piety, is worthless. Many have fallen into the error, that there can be no excess in feelings which have God for their object; and, distrusting as coldness that self-possession without which virtue and devotion lose all their dignity, they have abandoned themselves to extravagances, which

have brought contempt on piety. Most certainly, if the love of God be that which often bears its name, the less we have of it, the better. If religion be the shipwreck of understanding, we cannot keep too far from it. On this subject, we always speak plainly. We cannot sacrifice our reason to the reputation of zeal. We owe it to truth and religion to maintain, that fanaticism, partial insanity, sudden impressions, and ungovernable transports are any thing rather than piety.

We conceive, that the true love of God is a moral sentiment, founded on a clear perception, and consisting in a high esteem and veneration, of his moral perfections. Thus it perfectly coincides, and is in fact the same thing, with the love of virtue, rectitude, and goodness. You will easily judge, then, what we esteem the surest and only decisive signs of piety. We lay no stress on strong excitements. We esteem him, and him only, a pious man, who practically conforms to God's moral perfections and government; who shows his delight in God's benevolence, by loving and serving his neighbour; his delight in God's justice, by being resolutely upright; his sense of God's purity, by regulating his thoughts, imagination, and desires; and whose conversation, business, and domestic life are swayed by a regard to God's presence and authority. In all things else, men may deceive themselves. Disordered nerves may give them strange sights, and sounds, and impressions. Texts of Scripture may come to them as from heaven. Their whole souls may be moved, and their confidence in God's favor be undoubting. But in all this there is no religion. The question is, do they love God's commands, in which his character is fully expressed, and

give up to these their habits and passions? Without this, ecstacy is a mockery. One surrender of desire to God's will is worth a thousand transports. We do not judge of the bent of men's minds by their raptures, any more than we judge of the natural direction of a tree during a storm. We rather suspect loud profession, for we have observed that deep feeling is generally noiseless, and least seeks display.

We would not, by these remarks, be understood as wishing to exclude from religion warmth, and even transport. We honor and highly value true religious sensibility. We believe that Christianity is intended to act powerfully on our whole nature,—on the heart, as well as the understanding and the conscience. We conceive of heaven as a state where the love of God will be exalted into an unbounded fervor and joy; and we desire, in our pilgrimage here, to drink into the spirit of that better world. But we think that religious warmth is only to be valued, when it springs naturally from an improved character, when it comes unforced, when it is the recompense of obedience, when it is the warmth of a mind which understands God by being like him, and when, instead of disordering, it exalts the understanding, invigorates conscience, gives a pleasure to common duties, and is seen to exist in connection with cheerfulness, judiciousness, and a reasonable frame of mind. When we observe a fervor, called religious, in men whose general character expresses little refinement and elevation, and whose piety seems at war with reason, we pay it little respect. We honor religion too much to give its sacred name to a feverish, forced, fluctuating zeal, which has little power over the life.



Another important branch of virtue we believe to be love to Christ. The greatness of the work of Jesus, the spirit with which he executed it, and the sufferings which he bore for our salvation, we feel to be strong claims on our gratitude and veneration. We see in nature no beauty to be compared with the loveliness of his character, nor do we find on earth a benefactor to whom we owe an equal debt. We read his history with delight, and learn from it the perfection of our nature. We are particularly touched by his death, which was endured for our redemption, and by that strength of charity which triumphed over his pains. His resurrection is the foundation of our hope of immortality. His intercession gives us boldness to draw nigh to the throne of grace, and we look up to heaven with new desire, when we think that, if we follow him here, we shall there see his benignant countenance and enjoy his friendship for ever.

I need not express to you our views on the subject of the benevolent virtues. We attach such importance to these, that we are sometimes reproached with exalting them above piety. We regard the spirit of love, charity, meekness, forgiveness, liberality, and beneficence, as the badge and distinction of Christians, as the brightest image we can bear of God, as the best proof of piety. On this subject, I need not and cannot enlarge; but there is one branch of benevolence which I ought not to pass over in silence, because we think that we conceive of it more highly and justly than many of our brethren. I refer to the duty of candor, charitable judgment, especially towards those who differ in religious opinion. We think that in nothing have Christians so widely departed from

their religion, as in this particular. We read with astonishment and horror the history of the Church; and sometimes, when we look back on the fires of persecution, and on the zeal of Christians in building up walls of separation and in giving up one another to perdition, we feel as if we were reading the records of an infernal, rather than a heavenly kingdom. An enemy to every religion, if asked to describe a Christian, would, with some show of reason, depict him as an idolater of his own distinguishing opinions, covered with badges of party, shutting his eyes on the virtues and his ears on the arguments of his opponents, arrogating all excellence to his own sect and all saving power to his own creed, sheltering under the name of pious zeal the love of domination, the conceit of infallibility, and the spirit of intolerance, and trampling on men's rights under the pretence of saving their souls.

We can hardly conceive of a plainer obligation on beings of our frail and fallible nature, who are instructed in the duty of candid judgment, than to abstain from condemning men of apparent conscientiousness and sincerity, who are chargeable with no crime but that of differing from us in the interpretation of the Scriptures, and differing, too, on topics of great and acknowledged obscurity. We are astonished at the hardihood of those, who, with Christ's warnings sounding in their ears, take on them the responsibility of making creeds for his Church, and cast out professors of virtuous lives for imagined errors, for the guilt of thinking for themselves. We know that zeal for truth is the cover for this usurpation of Christ's prerogative; but we think that zeal for truth, as it is called, is

very suspicious, except in men whose capacities and advantages, whose patient deliberation, and whose improvements in humility, mildness, and candor, give them a right to hope that their views are more just than those of their neighbours. Much of what passes for a zeal for truth, we look upon with little respect, for it often appears to thrive most luxuriantly where other virtues shoot up thinly and feebly; and we have no gratitude for those reformers, who would force upon us a doctrine which has not sweetened their own tempers, or made them better men than their neighbours.

We are accustomed to think much of the difficulties attending religious inquiries; difficulties springing from the slow development of our minds, from the power of early impressions, from the state of society, from human authority, from the general neglect of the reasoning powers, from the want of just principles of criticism and of important helps in interpreting Scripture, and from various other causes. We find, that on no subject have men, and even good men, ingrafted so many strange conceits, wild theories, and fictions of fancy, as on religion; and remembering, as we do, that we ourselves are sharers of the common frailty, we dare not assume infallibility in the treatment of our fellow-Christians, or encourage in common Christians, who have little time for investigation, the habit of denouncing and condemning other denominations, perhaps more enlightened and virtuous than their own. Charity, forbearance, a delight in the virtues of different sects, a backwardness to censure and condemn,—these are virtues, which, however poorly practised by us, we admire and recommend, and we would rather join ourselves to the

church in which they abound, than to any other communion, however elated with the belief of its own orthodoxy, however strict in guarding its creed, however burning with zeal against imagined error.

I have thus given the distinguishing views of those Christians in whose names I have spoken. We have embraced this system, not hastily or lightly, but after much deliberation, and we hold it fast, not merely because we believe it to be true, but because we regard it as purifying truth, as a doctrine according to godliness, as able to "work mightily" and to "bring forth fruit" in them who believe. That we wish to spread it, we have no desire to conceal; but we think that we wish its diffusion, because we regard it as more friendly to practical piety and pure morals than the opposite doctrines, because it gives clearer and nobler views of duty, and stronger motives to its performance, because it recommends religion at once to the understanding and the heart, because it asserts the lovely and venerable attributes of God, because it tends to restore the benevolent spirit of Jesus to his divided and afflicted Church, and because it cuts off every hope of God's favor, except that which springs from practical conformity to the life and precepts of Christ. We see nothing in our views to give offence, save their purity, and it is their purity which makes us seek and hope their extension through the world.

My friend and brother:— You are this day to take upon you important duties; to be clothed with an office which the Son of God did not disdain; to devote yourself to that religion which the most hallowed lips have preached, and the most precious blood sealed. We trust that you will



bring to this work a willing mind, a firm purpose, a martyr's spirit, a readiness to toil and suffer for the truth, a devotion of your best powers to the interests of piety and virtue. I have spoken of the doctrines which you will probably preach; but I do not mean that you are to give yourself to controversy. You will remember that good practice is the end of preaching, and will labor to make your people holy livers, rather than skilful disputants. Be careful, lest the desire of defending what you deem truth, and of repelling reproach and misrepresentation, turn you aside from your great business, which is to fix in men's minds a living conviction of the obligation, sublimity, and happiness of Christian virtue. The best way to vindicate your sentiments is to show, in your preaching and life, their intimate connection with Christian morals, with a high and delicate sense of duty, with candor towards your opposers, with inflexible integrity, and with an habitual reverence for God. If any light can pierce and scatter the clouds of prejudice, it is that of a pure example. My brother, may your life preach more loudly than your lips. Be to this people a pattern of all good works, and may your instructions derive authority from a well-grounded belief in your hearers, that you speak from the heart, that you preach from experience, that the truth which you dispense has wrought powerfully in your own heart, that God, and Jesus, and heaven are not merely words on your lips, but most affecting realities to your mind, and springs of hope, and consolation, and strength in all your trials. Thus laboring, may you reap abundantly, and have a testimony of your faithfulness, not only in your own conscience, but in the esteem, love, virtues, and improvements of your people

To all who hear me, I would say, with the Apostle,—  
“Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.” Do not, brethren, shrink from the duty of searching God’s word for yourselves, through fear of human censure and denunciation. Do not think that you may innocently follow the opinions which prevail around you, without investigation, on the ground, that Christianity is now so purified from errors as to need no laborious research. There is much reason to believe that Christianity is at this moment dishonored by gross and cherished corruptions. If you remember the darkness which hung over the Gospel for ages; if you consider the impure union which still subsists in almost every Christian country between the church and the state, and which enlists men’s selfishness and ambition on the side of established error; if you recollect in what degree the spirit of intolerance has checked free inquiry, not only before, but since, the Reformation; you will see that Christianity cannot have freed itself from all the human inventions which disfigured it under the Papal tyranny. No. Much stubble is yet to be burnt; much rubbish to be removed; many gaudy decorations, which a false taste has hung around Christianity, must be swept away; and the earth-born fogs which have long shrouded it must be scattered, before this divine fabric will rise before us in its native and awful majesty, in its harmonious proportions, in its mild and celestial splendors. This glorious reformation in the Church, we hope, under God’s blessing, from the progress of the human intellect, from the moral progress of society, from the consequent decline of prejudice and bigotry, and, though last not least, from the subversion of human authority in matters of religion, from the fall of

those hierarchies, and other human institutions, by which the minds of individuals are oppressed under the weight of numbers, and a Papal dominion is perpetuated in the Protestant Church. Our earnest prayer to God is, that he will overturn, and overturn, and overturn, the strongholds of spiritual usurpation, until HE shall come whose right it is to rule the minds of men; that the conspiracy of ages against the liberty of Christians may be brought to an end; that the servile assent so long yielded to human creeds may give place to honest and devout inquiry into the Scriptures; and that Christianity, thus purified from error, may put forth its almighty energy, and prove itself, by its ennobling influence on the mind, to be indeed "the power of God unto salvation."

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# UNITARIANISM

VINDICATED AGAINST THE CHARGE

OF

SCEPTICAL TENDENCIES.

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BY JAMES WALKER.

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## UNITARIANISM VINDICATED.

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MEN may take their religion on trust, or make it a matter of inquiry and rational conviction. Unitarians prefer and adopt the latter course; holding it to be their privilege and duty to do so, and essential to consistent Protestantism. With them it is not enough that the church has decided in favor of a particular doctrine; or that the doctrine belongs to the religion established by law; or that it was held by their ancestors, and is still held by the majority. On the infinitely important subject of religion, and with the Bible in their hands, they do not feel themselves at liberty to waive the right to read for themselves, and judge for themselves. One of the consequences of acting on this principle is, as might be expected, that they come to some conclusions differing materially from those commonly received; and also that they do not agree exactly with one another; nor the same man with himself at different times, for of course as he

continues his inquiries he may receive more light. This circumstance, however, has afforded occasion for one of the most common and serious objections urged against them. Their way of proceeding, it is said, has a tendency to unsettle men's minds, and introduce a general scepticism; and the whole system has been branded as the half-way house to infidelity.

We propose to take up this single charge, and give it a careful and thorough examination. After a few preliminary remarks on the nature of faith, and the history and present state of the particular question at issue, we shall be prepared to demonstrate, that there is nothing in Unitarianism itself, nor in its rejection of certain popular doctrines, nor in the general manner in which it has been, or is, defended and maintained, to warrant the suspicions and imputations just named.

It does not follow necessarily that a man believes a particular doctrine, merely because he thinks he does; for he may be mistaken in regard to this fact, as well as in regard to any other. To know whether we believe a particular doctrine, we must know, in the first place, what the doctrine is; in the second place, we must know what our own ideas on the subject really are; and in the third place, we must compare the doctrine and our own ideas together, and see whether they agree. Now we hazard nothing in saying, that many never think of going through this process; and those who undertake it, are liable to mistake at every step, and of course may be mistaken in the conclusion. The truth is, — and why should men try or affect not to see it? — most persons adopt the religious phraseology which happens to prevail where they are brought up; and as they do this in early childhood, they



do it before they can be expected to use such phraseology understandingly, and a habit of using it vaguely and mechanically is formed and perpetuated. It is no sufficient evidence, therefore, that a man believes the popular doctrines in religion, merely because he uses the popular language ; for he may use this language in a different or qualified sense, or, which is still more probable, he may use it in no determinate sense. As a general rule, indeed, we suspect that conversions to Unitarianism, especially when they take place among serious and devout people, do not imply any material change in their convictions, but only that they have ascertained what their real convictions are, and are not restrained by considerations either of interest or fear from avowing them.

Again, it does not follow necessarily, that a man believes a particular doctrine, merely because he wishes he did, and is willing to take it for granted. It may be for his interest to believe ; he may be persuaded or frightened into the opinion that he ought to believe ; he may honestly think that believing would make him a better man ; but, after all, he cannot believe, until he is convinced. Faith is not a simple act of the will ; nor can it be strengthened or weakened or changed, or in any way modified, by a simple act of the will. It is the involuntary yielding of the mind to a preponderance of evidence as it strikes us at the time. True, in some states of mind we are much more likely to believe, than in others ; but it is because in different states of mind the same evidence strikes us differently, being viewed under different aspects ; and not because the will, simply considered, has any control over our convictions. In all cases without exception, let our state of mind be what it may belief is the involun-

tary assent of the understanding to a preponderance of evidence, as it strikes us at the time. It does depend on a man's will what professions he shall make, and what church he shall attend, and what party he shall connect himself with; and he may take every thing he hears for granted, if he pleases, and he may reason, and to a certain extent he may act on it, as if it were true;—but what has this to do with real belief? He may wish to believe; he may try to believe; he may say he believes; still, however, it is not belief, in any proper sense of that word, unless he is convinced. It resembles much more nearly what children call “making believe.” For fashion's sake, for interest's sake, for peace' sake, perhaps for conscience' sake he may make believe; but this is the utmost he can do, until he is convinced.

Further; it is idle to think of believing a proposition, the terms of which we do not and cannot understand. A man may believe, perhaps, that a proposition, unintelligible to himself, is nevertheless true; but this is not believing the proposition itself, but only in the authority of the proposition. A man may believe, perhaps, that a truth is asserted in such a proposition; but this is not believing the truth asserted, but only that a truth is asserted. To believe a proposition is to believe what is asserted in the proposition; but, before we can believe what is asserted in the proposition, we must know what is asserted. If we do not know what is asserted in a proposition, how do we know, how can we know, but that we believe exactly the contrary? A man's real belief on any subject is neither more nor less than his ideas on that subject. Set before him, then, an unintelligible proposition, and we should like to be informed, how he is to tell

whether his ideas agree with it, or not; and on the supposition that they do not, we should like to be informed, how he is to proceed in order to make them agree. The mysteries of the New Testament are not unintelligible propositions, but secrets, hidden, it is true, from the foundation of the world, until they were disclosed by Jesus Christ, and his apostles, but now that they are disclosed, as intelligible as any other truths. There are also mysteries in nature, mysteries as yet undisclosed; but these are not unintelligible propositions, nor propositions of any kind, but ultimate facts, beyond which, at present, we cannot go either in our reasonings or conceptions. What abuse of language, therefore, as well as confusion of ideas, is implied in thinking to believe ourselves, or to make others believe, unintelligible propositions under the name of mysteries, awful mysteries? And yet how much effect this cry of mystery, awful mystery, has had in inducing men to suppose that they believed, merely because they were afraid to inquire. After the advocates of error have been driven from every other position, they have always been able to turn round on their pursuers, and raise the cry of mystery, awful mystery; and the strongest minds have been daunted, and withdrawn their objections as presumptuous and irreverent, and acquiesced in absurdities and superstitions, which they had again and again refuted. In following back the history of our religion we are reminded, at almost every step, of the inscription on the forehead of the woman in the Apocalypse, who prefigured the abuses and corruptions in the church: "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

But the days of mystery and concealment are passing

away ; for men have learned from the Scriptures themselves to prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good. There are those who are alarmed at this ; but the man who fears that inquiry will make him a sceptic, shows himself a sceptic already. All interferences to repress freedom of thought, all attempts to deter men from hearing and reading on both sides, all appeals to the fears and prejudices of the people to prevent a free and open discussion of novel opinions, originate in that very scepticism, which they are vainly thought to preclude. It is the policy of men, whatever they may say to the contrary, who have no confidence in their own cause, and therefore dread, above all things, the inquisitive and searching spirit which is trying the systems and institutions of the world, as by fire. Some will contend, we are aware, that they have no objection to a free discussion of religious subjects, provided it is confined to the privileged and well-educated classes ; but the people, the common people must be kept at a distance, at all events, and not be suffered to break through and gaze. You cannot do it. The distinction of modern times does not consist so much in a greater advancement of knowledge, as in a greater diffusion of knowledge ; and the consequence is, not that the few are less inclined to impose on the many than formerly, but that the many have become acquainted with their rights and powers, and will not permit it. If ignorance is the mother of devotion in the common people, you have committed a fatal error in allowing education to become general ; but the light has gone forth, and you cannot recall it, and those who have learned to think for themselves on other subjects, will think for themselves on the subject of religion. It is a full century too late for



timid expedients and half-way measures, and the discussion of all subjects literary and moral, political and religious, must be free, free as the air, and while free, safe, for in the world of mind, as of matter, it is repression only which produces violence.\*

We are now prepared to inquire whether there is any thing in Unitarianism itself to unsettle men's minds, and introduce a general scepticism.

The distinction between the Unitarian and the Trinitarian is not, that the former thinks himself supported by reason, and the latter by Scripture. Each thinks himself supported by Scripture, and the only difference in this connection is, that the Unitarian thinks himself supported

\* "The universal education of the poor, which no earthly power can prevent, although it may retard it, is loudly demanded by the united voices of the moralist and politician. But if the people are to be enlightened at all, it is unavailing and inconsistent to resort to half measures and timid expedients ; to treat them at once as men and as children ; to endow them with the power of thinking, and at the same time to fetter its exercise ; to make an appeal to their reason, and yet to distrust its decisions ; to give them the stomach of a lion, and feed them with the aliment of a lamb. The promoters of the universal education of the poor ought to be aware that they are setting in motion, or at least accelerating the action of an engine too powerful to be controlled at their pleasure, and likely to prove fatal to all those parts of their own systems, which rest not on the solid foundation of reality. They ought to know, that they are necessarily giving birth to a great deal of doubt and investigation ; that they are undermining the power of prejudice, and the influence of mere authority and prescription ; that they are creating an immense number of keen inquirers and original thinkers, whose intellectual force will be turned, in the first instance, upon subjects which are dearest to the heart, and of most importance to society." — *Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions*, pp. 150, 151.

by reason too. Besides, it must be conceded, on all hands, that Christianity, as represented by Unitarians, is made to appear more reasonable and probable in itself, while nothing is done to detract in the smallest degree from its historical evidences. Open any popular work on the evidences, Paley's, for example, and you cannot turn to a single important argument, illustration, or allusion, which the Unitarian may not urge with just as much confidence in proof of Christianity, as he understands it, as the Trinitarian can in proof of Christianity, as he understands it. The question here is not, how strong this evidence is, or how much it will prove, or whether it will prove any thing ; but we say, that it will prove as much for the Unitarian as it will for the Trinitarian. This, then, is a true statement of the case ; Unitarian views are sustained by the same evidence and authority with the Trinitarian, and the only difference, is, that Unitarian views are more reasonable and probable in themselves. Now we ask, whether a man is less likely to believe in Christianity merely because it is made to appear more reasonable and probable in itself, the evidence and authority for it remaining the same ? Take any system or theory, and make it appear more reasonable and probable in itself, and can it be supposed for one moment that it will require more external evidence to convince men of its truth ? or that the same external evidence will not produce in them an equal degree of conviction ? We neither judge nor despise those who believe or profess to believe in apparent contradictions or incongruities ; for they have a right to do so, and they ought to do so, if they think these apparent contradictions or incongruities part of divine revelation. But we are speak-

ing of those who are honestly convinced, that these apparent contradictions or incongruities are not part of divine revelation, are not taught in the Bible. Taking this view of the subject, we can hardly look on a man as serious, who still persists in maintaining, that one's faith in Christianity is less likely to be hearty and entire, merely because it comes to him supported at the same time by Scripture, and reason, and conscience, and his best feelings, and all nature.

This is one of those questions, a fair, clear, and forcible statement of which makes all discussion superfluous. Besides, it is not enough considered, in this connection, that the external evidences of Christianity are of a moral or historical nature, and do not therefore, and cannot amount to demonstration. So long as the intrinsic improbability of what is to be proved falls within a certain limit, these evidences are sufficient; but they cease to be sufficient as soon as the intrinsic improbability of what is to be proved is made to exceed this limit. The impartial and discriminating inquirer will take care, at every step, to weigh the external evidences of what is to be proved against its intrinsic improbability, and the balance, one way or the other, will be the measure of his faith, or of his scepticism. To make Christianity, therefore, appear more reasonable and probable in itself, has the same effect, so far as a rational conviction of its truth is concerned, as adding so much to its external evidences, and to make it appear less reasonable and probable in itself, has the same effect as detracting so much from its external evidences. It is folly, moreover, to shut our eyes on the fact, that in all educated and enlightened communities, the traditionary faith is gradually losing its hold on the public mind. Tempo-

rary alarms and excitements may do something to counteract this tendency ; but that it exists, and is felt, is manifest in the feverish eagerness evinced of late by most even of the exclusive sects in altering their policy, and, in some respects, their doctrines and institutions, to accommodate themselves to it. Once the apparent inconsistencies and absurdities in the popular faith constituted no obstacle to its prevalence as matter of profession at least, if not of actual belief ; but the time is coming, and in many places now is, when with men of intelligence and reflection the only question likely to arise is, whether they shall have a more rational religion, or none. Among every people there must be a certain correspondence and harmony, if we may so express it, between the religion as publicly professed and taught, and their moral and intellectual progress in other respects, or a spirit of indifference or disgust will grow up in regard to it, a thousand times more fatal to every thing like a true and living faith, than speculative doubts. In proof of this we need but refer to the state of things in England during the Protectorate and the reign of Charles the Second, and in France for some time prior to the Revolution, and in some parts of Germany at the present moment. Unitarianism, therefore, nominally or virtually held, in a free and enlightened community like ours, instead of opening on us, as some would pretend, the floodgates of infidelity, presents under God, as we conceive, the only effectual barrier against its encroachments.

Admitting, however, that there is nothing in Unitarianism itself to induce scepticism, the question arises whether it does not omit or reject certain principles or doctrines, which lie at the foundation of an unshaken trust in revelation.



In the first place, Unitarians entertain different views from those which have prevailed in some sects respecting what is called "the witness of the Spirit." Paul, writing to the Romans, says, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The spirit itself," or, as it ought to be rendered, this very spirit, "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."\* The meaning of the original may be rendered more fully and intelligibly thus: "Ye have not again received the spirit of slaves, which is fear, but the spirit of adopted sons, by which we appeal to God, as our Father. This very spirit, if we are conscious of possessing it, bears witness with our spirit, affords us the necessary evidence, that we are the children of God." The Scriptures neither here, nor in any other passage, countenance the presumption, that to be a Christian, and a believer in the truth, it is necessary for a man to be assured of the fact by some mysterious and preternatural intimation from above. At the same time, it is not wonderful that persons acting under a belief that such an intimation was to be expected, especially if they are of an excitable and imaginative temperament, should often work themselves into an impression that they have received it. Accordingly we find that Deists and Mahomedans, as well as Christians, and that Christians of different denominations, and of irreconcilable and contradictory views, have supposed themselves to receive mysterious and preternatural intimations from God, sometimes externally and sometimes internally, each one of the correctness of his own peculiar sentiments, and of

\* Romans viii. 15, 16.

the safety of his own condition. Nay, the same individual will sometimes alter his religious opinions and practices three or four times in the course of his life, and yet declare and honestly believe, after each change, that he has had mysterious and preternatural assurances that he is infallibly right at last. Shall we say, then, that all these pretences to infallibility and divine illumination are well founded? Certainly not; for this would be to make God expressly confirm and sanction all manner of contradictions. Besides, if we go over to the Quaker, because he is confident that he is right from divine intimations, as he regards them, then also, and for the same reason, to be consistent, we must go over to the Methodist, and the high Calvinist, and the Swedenborgian, each of whom is not a whit less confident than the Quaker, that he, too, is right, from divine intimations, as he regards them. The argument, by proving too much, proves nothing.

Still it may be argued that these supposed divine intimations, however they may be regarded by others, must exclude all doubt from those who are conscious of them. Conscious of what? They are conscious, doubtless, of certain internal impressions, emotions, or suggestions; and of the fact of these internal impressions, emotions, or suggestions, consciousness is, we admit, an infallible witness. But that these internal impressions, emotions, or suggestions are from God is not a matter of consciousness, but of inference, and perhaps, as they must know, of mistaken inference. If, therefore, while relying on supposed divine intimations, I see my neighbors, by trusting to the same kind of evidence, led into conclusions the very opposite to mine, must I not, if I am a man of discernment and reflection, begin to suspect the evidence itself?

If I see multitudes around me, whose honesty and sincerity I cannot question, misled by a confidence in supposed divine intimations, may I not, must I not, begin to suspect that I also may be misled in the same way? I cannot doubt, it is true, the reality of those impressions, emotions, or suggestions, of which I am conscious; but I can alter my mind respecting their nature and origin. Impressions, emotions, or suggestions, which I used to regard as mysterious and preternatural intimations from above, I may find can be explained on a different hypothesis, and more satisfactorily. It is not true, therefore, that a consciousness of supposed divine intimations and assurances will exclude doubt; for this consciousness must always be accompanied by another, that in regard to the first we may be self-deceived. The very same reasons and arguments, which, as we have shown, should lead a man who makes no pretensions to mysterious and preternatural intimations, to suspect those who do, should also lead those who do not suspect themselves. Hence it appears that Unitarians lose nothing on the score either of evidence, or argument, or confidence, by rejecting as unscriptural and illusory the popular doctrine of the witness of the Spirit.

Again; it may be alleged that Unitarians throw every thing into uncertainty by the peculiar views which they hold and inculcate respecting inspiration. Unitarians believe in the divine origin of the Christian religion, and in its supernatural and miraculous origin. They believe that our Lord and his apostles were inspired, — supernaturally, miraculously inspired. Accordingly they conclude, and cannot but conclude, that the writers of the New Testament, possessing such means of information, must have carried in their minds at all times, in all places, and

to the end of life, a true, living, and unfailing knowledge of the doctrine of Christ. They make a distinction, however, between being inspired and being omniscient, holding that the inspiration of the most favored of these writers extended only to what is essential to the Christian doctrine. Their inspiration began and ended in a supernatural communication to their minds of a clear, abiding, and infallible perception of the vital and essential principles of the new dispensation. These they were afterwards left to state, illustrate, and recommend, as they were able, in their own language, and by their natural faculties. Unitarians do not think it necessary to maintain, nor safe to attempt to maintain, that the sacred writers were inspired as natural philosophers, metaphysicians, or critics, nor even as logicians, chronologers, or historians. They distinguish, moreover, between the Christian revelation, which existed, and had been extensively diffused many years before a line of the Christian Scriptures was written, and these Scriptures themselves, which are but a record of the revelation. And here we cannot but express our surprise and regret at the ignorance, or want of candor, or profligacy of those, who take every opportunity to affirm or insinuate that Unitarians do not believe in inspiration, or in the Bible as containing the Christian revelation, or that their views on these and the kindred subjects are essentially novel or peculiar. They are substantially the same views with those held by Grotius and Le Clerc, by Paley and the liberal divines generally of the Church of England, and by almost the entire body of German theologians at the present day, the professed Rationalists excepted. "Had the Deity," says Michaelis, "inspired not a single book of the New Testament, but left the apostles



and evangelists without any other aid than that of natural abilities to commit what they knew to writing, admitting their works to be authentic, and possessed of a sufficient degree of credibility, the Christian religion would still remain the true one." \* Upon which Bishop Marsh remarks, "Here our author makes a distinction, which is at present very generally received, between the divine origin of the Christian doctrine, and the divine origin of the writings in which that doctrine is recorded." †

It is remarkable that the views of inspiration entertained by Unitarians, in common, it is believed, with the majority of enlightened Protestants, and which have exposed them in some quarters to the suspicion of scepticism, have been insisted on for the sole purpose of meeting the objections of infidels. They are under no necessity, and they feel no disposition, in their controversies with other Christians, to avail themselves of any latitude of interpretation, which these views of inspiration might be supposed to warrant, in ascertaining what is to be received as the simple, unadulterated truth. In their controversies with Trinitarians and Calvinists, for example, even if it were assumed, on both sides, that every word and letter, nay the very punctuation, of canonical and genuine Scripture were inspired, it would not in their minds vary the result. But on subjects not connected with the Christian doctrine, or merely collateral and unessential, discrepancies and contradictions occur in the sacred writings which never have been reconciled by a fair and legitimate construction, and never can be. It is necessary, therefore, either to adopt views of inspiration which are consistent with

\* Marsh's *Michaelis*, Vol. I. p. 72.

† *Ib.* p. 379.

such discrepancies and contradictions, or give up inspiration altogether. Some persons appear to think and reason as if by embracing the extreme doctrine of a plenary inspiration, something is gained to the argument for the truth of Christianity. A moment's reflection, however, must be sufficient, it would seem, to convince every one, that its effect, on the contrary, must be merely to embarrass that argument, and, in our opinion, fatally. After taking this ground it is not sufficient, as with us, to establish the general truth and authority of the Scriptures; but even the minutest inaccuracy in history or philosophy to be found in them will be fastened on by the sceptic and the infidel, and becomes an insuperable objection. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible, that those who can believe in the Bible, holding at the same time the extreme doctrine of a plenary inspiration, would believe in it with infinitely less misgiving, if they felt themselves at liberty to adopt the modified form of that doctrine as held by Unitarians, and rational Christians generally. Waiving, as we purposely do in this place, the question of the correctness of Unitarian views of inspiration, and their accordance with Scripture, and considering them merely in their connection with the evidences of Christianity, and in their bearing on faith, it is obvious, that, instead of promoting, they must have a tendency to prevent or arrest a spirit of scepticism in those who hold them, and in the community.

There is, then, nothing peculiar to Unitarianism, either in what it admits or in what it rejects, which can be justly suspected of sceptical or infidel tendencies. We shall next inquire, as proposed, whether the whole system has become justly liable to a suspicion of this nature from the

manner in which it is arrived at, or in which it has been, and is, defended and maintained.

Exceptions have been taken to the extent to which Unitarians have carried their rejection of human authority, as such, in matters of faith and conscience. The radical mistake committed by those who are forever hovering round this objection, consists in supposing that authority can exclude doubt, after doubts have arisen respecting the authority. The freedom, and in some instances the licentiousness of thought which has shown itself in modern times, has not had its origin, as some seem to imagine, in policy, or in an experiment, or in a particular inculcation, but has grown necessarily out of the progress of society and the human mind. It is idle to expect that the people, if allowed and encouraged to inquire freely on all other subjects, will long permit themselves to be hoodwinked and bound on the subject of religion. Accustomed to ask a reason for every thing else, they will ask a reason for the authority which any man, or any body of men may arrogate in matters of faith; and in this way doubts will arise respecting the authority itself, and these doubts will extend themselves, of course, to every thing resting on this authority. They may still, it is true, profess an outward respect for the authority in question, and agree to appeal to it as of final jurisdiction in order to have some means of settling or preventing controversies; but their faith is gone. It is remarkable that in the church which makes the greatest pretensions to authority, and on the whole with the best show of reason, and in countries, too, where this authority has been enforced with every advantage to be derived either from government or public opinion, scepticism and infidelity have made the most alarm-

ing inroads. Among Protestants, too, the utter inefficacy of mere authority to foreclose sceptical and infidel tendencies is manifest in the case of German anti-supernaturalism, which has arisen and grown up under an outward respect and conformity to the most orthodox creeds and establishments. All that authority can do in matters of faith, is to introduce the old distinction between esoterics and exoterics, to make it necessary for men to think with the wise and talk with the vulgar; a state of things much more likely, especially in a country like ours, to root out every vestige of a sincere and honest belief, than the most reckless spirit of innovation.

Besides, much of the scepticism which is sometimes referred to the public and free discussion of religious subjects, does not originate in these discussions, but is only brought to light by them. There is a latent and passive scepticism much more widely diffused in the community than is generally supposed, which, in our judgment, is to the full as culpable in itself, and as injurious in its moral influences, as an open and active scepticism, and much more difficult to cure. We should not regard it as an evil, therefore, even if it could be proved that the discussions provoked by Unitarianism have made some men sensible to their doubts, and disposed in some instances to avow and defend them; for it is not until their scepticism has put on this form, that it can be fairly met either by themselves or others. If we must have an active or a passive scepticism, give us the first. An active scepticism will often cure itself, work itself clear of its difficulties; but there is no hope whatever of a man who will neither believe nor inquire. An active scepticism, moreover, does not imply an indifference to truth, nor prevent



men from discriminating ; so that while it leads them to deny this thing, and doubt that, it leaves their confidence in other things unimpaired, and perhaps strengthened and quickened. But it is of the nature of a latent and passive scepticism, by confounding the true with the false, and the certain with the doubtful, to spread itself gradually over the whole subject, involving natural as well as revealed religion in the same doubt, and causing them to be regarded with a like indifference, if not contempt. Under the influence of this spirit the best that men can be expected to do, is to settle down at last into the conceited and supercilious conclusion, that Christianity, whether true or not, is a good thing for society, and especially for the lower classes, and must not be disturbed. We know of nothing more likely to move an ingenuous mind to indignation, than to see one who from indolence or indifference is secretly sceptical as to all religion, joining, however, in the vulgar cry of heresy or infidelity against those who will not assent to what neither he nor they believe. We can bear with the opposition, and even with the personal abuse of the bigot and the fanatic, for they are honest, or at least consistent ; but we find it more difficult to command our feelings, when worldly, intriguing, hollow-hearted men array themselves against reform, and affect a concern for prejudices and antiquated errors, which in their hearts they despise.

Again, it has been said, that in most communities, to arrive at Unitarianism, men must give up many of the doctrines in which they were educated, and that the giving up of each of these doctrines must weaken their confidence in those which they retain. It is obvious, in the first place, that this objection does not apply to Unitari-

anism in any other sense than it does to every reformation, and particularly to the Protestant reformation. Besides, it proceeds in this case on a forgetfulness of the important circumstances insisted on above, that the doctrines discarded by Unitarians were a dead weight on the whole system, and of course that the system, thus relieved, must meet with a more ready and entire assent. We are willing, nevertheless, to admit that men's confidence in simple and pure Christianity must be most perfect in those cases, in which in order to arrive at it they are not obliged to reject any human additions or corruptions with which it has been connected. From this, however, our only inference is, not that men should not be instructed in Unitarianism, but that they should never be instructed in any thing else. If a certain degree of scepticism always adheres to a mind which is conscious of having been once imposed upon and abused, the whole blame of the scepticism should certainly be thrown back on the imposition and abuse, in which it originated. If innovation in itself considered be an evil, especially in religion, the evil should be referred not to Unitarianism, but to the false views in which the people have been educated, and which in the general advancement of knowledge make innovation unavoidable. So far, too, as the charge of having actually innovated on the faith of our ancestors is concerned, it is obvious that the Orthodox of the present day, in New England certainly, are in the same condemnation. If any say, that they have not given up doctrines which they themselves deem essential and fundamental, it should be recollected that we also can say as much; for neither have we given up doctrines, which we ourselves deem essential and fundamental. If they say, on the other hand,

that they have not given up doctrines deemed essential and fundamental by the first reformers, the Puritans, and their own immediate ancestors, they say what is not true. By rejecting, as they have done almost unanimously, the doctrines of imputation and particular election, for example, they have already innovated as essentially on the traditionary faith, as they would do if they were to go further, and reject the doctrine of the trinity itself.

We prefer, however, to meet this charge of innovation on its own merits. Why should it be thought necessary to defend ourselves against the imputation or suspicion of sceptical or infidel tendencies, merely because we have departed from some of the doctrines held by the first reformers? The progress of society and the human mind did not stop with their labors. On the contrary, there has never been a period in the history of man, during which this progress has been so rapid and perceptible as during the last three centuries. We see it in every thing;—in the disappearance of a thousand weak and debasing superstitions; in the repeal of many useless, oppressive, and sanguinary laws; in the great improvements which have obtained in education; in the prevalence of a more liberal spirit on all subjects, and in the resistance felt and manifested against every form of usurpation and tyranny. Nor does this progress appear in any thing more than in those sciences necessary to the critical understanding of the Scriptures, and the effectual exposure of the pretences of false religions. Now, are we to believe, can it be imagined, that society and the human mind have been advancing for three long centuries, with unparalleled rapidity, in every thing else but religion, and even in the means of advancement in religion, and

yet that in religion itself, they have not advanced a single step? Possessing the same natural powers with the first reformers, and all the advantages which they had, and many more besides, — entering, as it were, on their labors, and beginning where they left off, is it to be believed, can it be imagined, that the pious, the learned, and the inquisitive, for three long centuries, have not been able to go forward a single step? The Protestant reformation grew out of the progress of society, and the human mind, and this progress has been continually going on. Assign, then, if you can, a single earthly reason possessing even the poor merit of being merely plausible, why this reformation should not go on with its cause. The first reformers were but men, and acted as other men would have acted in the same circumstances. Is it probable, then, we would ask, — nay, is it possible, that mere men, uninspired men, who had but just broken away from the most degrading prejudices and superstitions, and who still thought, reasoned, and acted under circumstances the most unfavorable of all to cool and impartial deliberation, — is it possible, that such men, in the hurry and passion of a great moral revolution, could strike out at a single blow a difficult and complicated system, which in all after time would neither require revision, nor admit of correction?

At the same time, we would not be understood to speak disparagingly of the claims which the first reformers have on our respect and gratitude. They certainly possessed many noble qualities, and we would honor these qualities; nay more, we would imitate them. Yes, who are the men that imitate the first reformers? — that strength and independence of mind, by which they broke away from the



prejudices of education ; that noble daring, or rather that strict adherence to principle, with which they hesitated not to avow the convictions they felt, though new and unpopular doctrines ; and the firmness with which they stood their ground against the voice of numbers, and the cry of schism, innovation, heresy. Yes, we repeat it, who are the men that imitate the first reformers ? It is bringing strange names into fellowship, but it is nevertheless true, that Priestley was the Luther of his times.\*

\* “ You say the petitioners are innovators. They deny this, and say they are antiquarians, only not superstitious enough to prefer the rust to the medal. But without availing themselves of this, they prove that the love of novelty is natural, that it puts men on inventing some things, and improving others ; that new discoveries by the people call for new limitations, protections, laws from the state ; that the yearly assembling of the states is an allowance of the necessity of abrogating some laws, reforming others, and making new ones. That therefore innovation is neither foreign from the nature of things in general, nor from the British constitution in particular ; and they might add that almost all the great men, that have appeared in the world have owed their reputation to their skill in innovating. Their names, their busts, their books, their eulogiums, diffused through all countries, are a just reward for their innovations. When idolatry had overspread the world Moses was the minister of a grand and noble innovation. When time had corrupted the institutions of Moses, Hezekiah innovated again, destroying what even Moses had set up ; and when the reformation of others were inadequate, Jesus Christ, ascending his throne, created all things new ; twelve innovators went one way, seventy another, their sound went into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world, reforming and renovating the whole face of the earth. When wealth had produced power, power subjection, subjection indolence, indolence ignorance, and the pure religion of Jesus was debased, here arises an Alfred, there a Charles ; Turin produces a Claude, Lyons a Waldo, England a Wickliff ; the courage of Luther,

Still the alarm will be rung in our ears, You have begun to innovate on the popular faith, and you will never know where to stop. To all Protestants, and indeed to most Catholics of the present day, it would be sufficient to reply, You also have begun to innovate on the popular faith, and will not know where to stop, any better than we. But we choose to put our vindication on higher ground. Our prayer to God is, that we may never stop. We admire the declaration introduced by the Polish Unitarians into the preface to their Catechism: "We do not think we ought to be ashamed if in some respects our church improves." We believe with Robinson, that "God has more light yet to break forth out of his holy word;" and besides, it is often a long time after the discovery of an important truth, before some of its most important applications are understood. We have too much confidence in Providence and in human nature to sympathize with those who

grow pale

Lest their own judgments should become too bright,  
And their free thoughts be crimes, and earth have too much light.

A spirit is abroad, as we have said, free, bold, uncompromising and terrible as an army with banners, which is trying the opinions and institutions of the world, as by fire. It is the duty of the wise and good to endeavor to guide this spirit, to restrain its excesses, and above all to

the zeal of Calvin, the eloquence of Beza, the patience of Cranmer all conspire to innovate again. Illustrious innovators! You pleaded for conscience against custom; your names will be transmitted to all posterity with deserved renown." — *Robinson's Arcana Miscellaneous Works*. — Vol. II. pp. 84, 85.

imbue it with a sincere and earnest love of truth, humanity, and God. But we fear not the issue. We believe that every accession of new light and intelligence will be found to illustrate and enforce the evidences of the Christian revelation, and give mankind a deeper and more living sense of its truth and reality.

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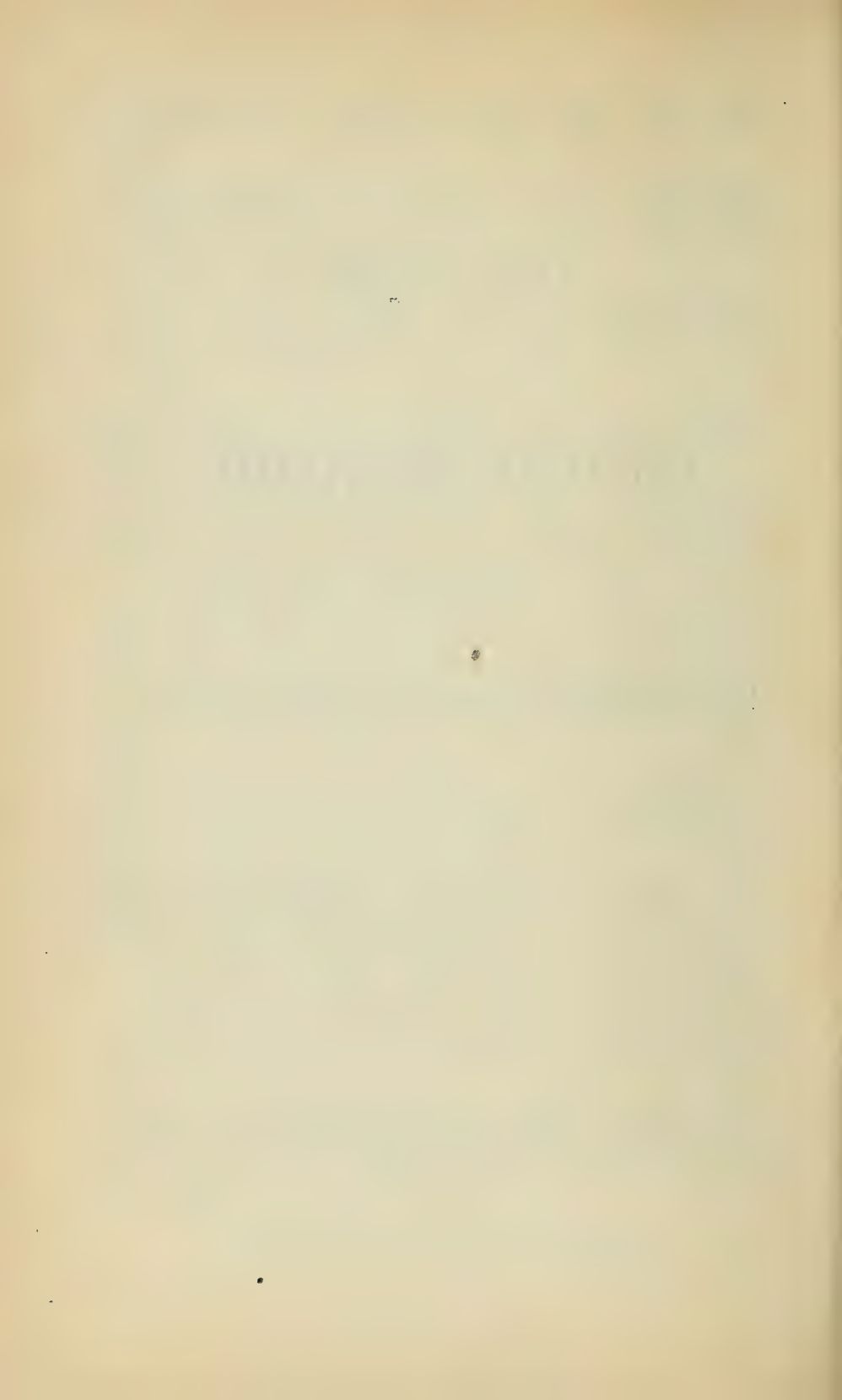
THE POWER  
OF  
UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY  
TO PRODUCE AN  
ENLIGHTENED AND FERVENT PIETY.

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BY W. E. CHANNING, D. D.

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION:  
BOSTON.



# THE POWER

## OF

### UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY.

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UNITARIANISM has been made a term of so much reproach, and has been uttered in so many tones of alarm, horror, indignation, and scorn, that to many it gives only a vague impression of something monstrous, impious, unutterably perilous. To such, I would say, that this doctrine, which is considered by some, as the last and most perfect invention of Satan, the consummation of his blasphemies, the most cunning weapon ever forged in the fires of hell, amounts to this — That there is One God, even the Father; and that Jesus Christ is not this One God, but his Son and Messenger, who derived all his powers and glories from the Universal Parent, and who came into the world not to claim supreme homage for himself, but to carry up the soul to his Father as the Only Divine Person, the Only Ultimate Object of religious worship. To us, this doctrine seems not to have sprung from hell, but to have descended from the throne of God,

and to invite and attract us thither. To us it seems to come from the Scriptures, with a voice loud as the sound of many waters, and as articulate and clear as if Jesus, in a bodily form, were pronouncing it distinctly in our ears.

That we desire to propagate this doctrine, we do not conceal. It is a treasure, which we wish not to confine to ourselves, which we dare not lock up in our own breasts. We regard it as given to us for others, as well as for ourselves. We should rejoice to spread it through this city, to carry it into every dwelling, and to send it far and wide to the remotest settlements of our country. Am I asked, why we wish this diffusion? We dare not say, that we are in no degree influenced by sectarian feeling; for we see it raging around us, and we should be more than men, were we wholly to escape an epidemic passion. We do hope, however, that our main purpose and aim is not sectarian, but to promote a purer and nobler piety than now prevails. We are not induced to spread our opinions by the mere conviction that they are true; for there are many truths, historical, metaphysical, scientific, literary, which we have no anxiety to propagate. We regard them as the highest, most important, most efficient truths, and therefore demanding a firm testimony, and earnest efforts to make them known. In thus speaking, we do not mean, that we regard our peculiar views as essential to salvation. Far from us be this spirit of exclusion, the very spirit of antichrist, the worst of all the delusions of popery and of protestantism. We hold nothing to be essential, but the simple and supreme dedication of the mind, heart, and life to God and to his will. This inward and practical devotedness to the



Supreme Being, we are assured, is attained and accepted under all the forms of Christianity. We believe, however, that it is favored by that truth which we maintain, as by no other system of faith. We regard Unitarianism as peculiarly the friend of inward, living, practical religion. For this we value it. For this we would spread it; and we desire none to embrace it, but such as shall seek and derive from it this celestial influence.

This character and property of Unitarian Christianity, its fitness to promote true, deep, and living piety, being our chief ground of attachment to it, I have thought proper to make this the topic of my present discourse. I do not propose to prove the truth of Unitarianism by scriptural authorities, for this argument would exceed the limits of a sermon, but to show its superior tendency to form an elevated, religious character. If, however, this position can be sustained, I shall have contributed no weak argument in support of the truth of our views; for the chief purpose of Christianity undoubtedly is, to promote piety, to bring us to God, to fill our souls with that Great Being, to make us alive to Him; and a religious system can carry no more authentic mark of a divine original, than its obvious, direct, and peculiar adaptation to quicken and raise the mind to its Creator. In speaking thus of Unitarian Christianity as promoting piety, I ought to observe that I use this word in its proper and highest sense. I mean not every thing which bears the name of piety, for under this title superstition, fanaticism, and formality are walking abroad and claiming respect. I mean not an anxious frame of mind, not abject and slavish fear, not a dread of hell, not a repetition of

forms, not church-going, not loud profession, not severe censure of others' irreligion; but filial love and reverence towards God, habitual gratitude, cheerful trust, ready obedience, and, though last not least, an imitation of the ever active and unbounded benevolence of the Creator.

The object of this discourse requires me to speak with great freedom of different systems of religion. But let me not be misunderstood. Let not the uncharitableness, which I condemn, be lightly laid to my charge. Let it be remembered, that I speak only of systems, not of those who embrace them. In setting forth with all simplicity what seem to me the good or bad tendencies of doctrines, I have not a thought of giving standards or measures by which to estimate the virtue or vice of their professors. Nothing would be more unjust, than to decide on men's characters from their peculiarities of faith; and the reason is plain. Such peculiarities are not the only causes which impress and determine the mind. Our nature is exposed to innumerable other influences. If, indeed, a man were to know nothing but his creed, were to meet with no human beings but those who adopt it, were to see no example, and to hear no conversation, but such as were formed by it; if his creed were to meet him everywhere, and to exclude every other object of thought; then his character might be expected to answer to it with great precision. But our Creator has not shut us up in so narrow a school. The mind is exposed to an infinite variety of influences, and these are multiplying with the progress of society. Education, friendship, neighborhood, public opinion, the state of society, "the genius of the place" where we live, books, events, the pleasures

and business of life, the outward creation, our physical temperament, and innumerable other causes, are perpetually pouring in upon the soul thoughts, views, and emotions ; and these influences are so complicated, so peculiarly combined in the case of every individual, and so modified by the original susceptibilities and constitution of every mind, that on no subject is there greater uncertainty than on the formation of character. To determine the precise operations of a religious opinion amidst this host of influences surpasses human power. A great truth may be completely neutralized by the countless impressions and excitements, which the mind receives from other sources ; and so a great error may be disarmed of much of its power, by the superior energy of other and better views, of early habits, and of virtuous examples. Nothing is more common than to see a doctrine believed without swaying the will. Its efficacy depends, not on the assent of the intellect, but on the place which it occupies in the thoughts, on the distinctness and vividness with which it is conceived, on its association with our common ideas, on its frequency of recurrence, and on its command of the attention, without which it has no life. Accordingly, pernicious opinions are not seldom held by men of the most illustrious virtue. I mean not then, in commending or condemning systems, to pass sentence on their professors. I know the power of the mind to select from a multifarious system, for its habitual use, those features or principles which are generous, pure, and ennobling, and by these, to sustain its spiritual life amidst the nominal profession of many errors. I know that a creed is one thing, as written in a book, and another, as it exists in the minds of its advocates. In the book, all the doc-

trines appear in equally strong and legible lines. In the mind, many are faintly traced and seldom recurred to, whilst others are inscribed as with sunbeams, and are the chosen, constant lights of the soul. Hence, in good men of opposing denominations, a real agreement may subsist as to their vital principles of faith ; and amidst the division of tongues, there may be unity of soul, and the same internal worship of God. By these remarks I do not mean that error is not evil, or that it bears no pernicious fruit. Its tendencies are always bad. But I mean, that these tendencies exert themselves amidst so many counteracting influences ; and that injurious opinions so often lie dead, through the want of mixture with the common thoughts, through the mind's not absorbing them, and changing them into its own substance ; that the highest respect may, and ought to be cherished for men, in whose creed we find much to disapprove. In this discourse I shall speak freely, and some may say severely, of Trinitarianism ; but I love and honor not a few of its advocates ; and in opposing what I deem their error, I would on no account detract from their worth. After these remarks I hope that the language of earnest discussion and strong conviction will not be construed into the want of that charity, which I acknowledge as the first grace of our religion.

I now proceed to illustrate and prove the superiority of Unitarian Christianity, as a means of promoting a deep and noble piety.

I. Unitarianism is a system most favorable to piety, because it presents to the mind One, and only one, Infinite Person, to whom supreme homage is to be paid. It does not weaken the energy of religious sentiment by dividing



it among various objects. It collects and concentrates the soul on One Father of unbounded, undivided, unrivalled glory. To Him, it teaches the mind to rise through all beings. Around Him it gathers all the splendors of the universe. To Him it teaches us to ascribe whatever good we receive or behold, the beauty and magnificence of nature, the liberal gifts of providence, the capacities of the soul, the bonds of society, and especially the riches of grace and redemption, the mission, and powers, and beneficent influences of Jesus Christ. All happiness it traces up to the Father, as the sole source ; and the mind, which these views have penetrated, through this intimate association of every thing exciting and exalting in the universe with One Infinite Parent, can and does offer itself up to him with the intensest and profoundest love, of which human nature is susceptible. The Trinitarian indeed professes to believe in one God and means to hold fast to this truth. But three persons, having distinctive qualities and relations, of whom one is sent and another the sender, one is given and another the giver, of whom one intercedes and another hears the intercession, of whom one takes flesh, and another never becomes incarnate, three persons, thus discriminated, are as truly three objects of the mind, as if they were acknowledged to be separate divinities ; and from the principles of our nature, they cannot act on the mind as deeply and powerfully as One Infinite Person, to whose sole goodness all happiness is ascribed. To multiply infinite objects for the heart, is to distract it. To scatter the attention among three equal persons, is to impair the power of each. The more strict and absolute the unity of God, the more easily and intimately all the

impressions and emotions of piety flow together, and are condensed into one glowing thought, one thrilling love. No language can express the absorbing energy of the thought of one Infinite Father. When vitally implanted in the soul, it grows and gains strength forever. It enriches itself by every new view of God's word and works ; gathers tribute from all regions and all ages ; and attracts into itself all the rays of beauty, glory, and joy, in the material and spiritual creation.

My hearers, as you would feel the full influence of God upon your souls, guard sacredly, keep unobscured and unsullied, that fundamental and glorious truth, that there is One, and only One Almighty Agent in the universe, One Infinite Father. Let this truth dwell in me in its uncorrupted simplicity, and I have the spring and nutriment of an ever-growing piety. I have an object for my mind towards which all things bear me. I know whither to go in all trial, whom to bless in all joy, whom to adore in all I behold. But let three persons claim from me supreme homage, and claim it on different grounds, one for sending and another for coming to my relief, and I am divided, distracted, perplexed. My frail intellect is overborne. Instead of One Father, on whose arm I can rest, my mind is torn from object to object, and I tremble, lest, among so many claimants of supreme love, I should withhold from one or another his due.

II. Unitarianism is the system most favorable to piety, because it holds forth and preserves inviolate the spirituality of God. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It is of great importance, to the progress and elevation of the religious principle, that we should refine more and more our con-

ceptions of God ; that we should separate from him all material properties, and whatever is limited or imperfect in our own nature ; that we should regard him as a pure intelligence, an unmixed and infinite Mind. When it pleased God to select the Jewish people and place them under miraculous interpositions, one of the first precepts given them was, that they should not represent God under any bodily form, any graven image, or the likeness of any creature. Next came Christianity, which had this as one of its great objects, to render religion still more spiritual, by abolishing the ceremonial and outward worship of former times, and by discarding those grosser modes of describing God, through which the ancient prophets had sought to impress an unrefined people.

Now Unitarianism concurs with this sublime moral purpose of God. It asserts his spirituality. It approaches him under no bodily form, but as a pure spirit, as the infinite and universal Mind. On the other hand, it is the direct influence of Trinitarianism to materialize men's conceptions of God ; and, in truth, this system is a relapse into the error of the rudest and earliest ages, into the worship of a corporeal God. Its leading feature is, the doctrine of a God clothed with a body, and acting and speaking through a material frame,—of the Infinite Divinity dying on a cross ; a doctrine, which in earthliness reminds us of the mythology of the rudest pagans, and which a pious Jew, in the twilight of the Mosaic religion, would have shrunk from with horror. It seems to me no small objection to the Trinity, that it supposes God to take a body in the later and more improved ages of the world, when it is plain, that such a manifestation, if needed at all, was peculiarly required in the infancy of the race.

The effect of such a system in debasing the idea of God, in associating with the Divinity human passions and infirmities, is too obvious to need much elucidation. On the supposition that the second person of the Trinity became incarnate, God may be said to be a material being, on the same general ground, on which this is affirmed of man; for man is material only by the union of the mind with the body; and the very meaning of incarnation is, that God took a body, through which he acted and spoke, as the human soul operates through its corporeal organs. Every bodily affection may thus be ascribed to God. Accordingly, the Trinitarian, in his most solemn act of adoration, is heard to pray in these appalling words: "Good Lord, deliver us; by the mystery of thy holy incarnation, by thy holy nativity and circumcision, by thy baptism, fasting, and temptation, by thine agony and bloody sweat, by thy cross and passion, good Lord, deliver us." Now I ask you to judge, from the principles of human nature, whether to worshippers, who adore their God for his wounds and tears, his agony, and blood, and sweat, the ideas of corporeal existence and human suffering will not predominate over the conceptions of a purely spiritual essence; whether the mind, in clinging to the man, will not lose the God; whether a surer method for depressing and adulterating the pure thought of the Divinity could have been devised. That the Trinitarian is unconscious of this influence of his faith, I know, nor do I charge it on him as a crime. Still it exists and cannot be too much deplored.

The Roman Catholics, true to human nature and their creed, have sought, by painting and statuary, to bring their imagined God before their eyes; and have thus obtained almost as vivid impressions of him, as if they had



lived with him on the earth. The Protestant condemns them for using these similitudes and representations in their worship; but if a Trinitarian, he does so to his own condemnation. For if, as he believes, it was once a duty to bow in adoration before the living body of his incarnate God, what possible guilt can there be in worshipping before the pictured or sculptured memorial of the same being? Christ's body may as truly be represented by the artist, as any other human form; and its image may be used as effectually and properly, as that of an ancient sage or hero, to recall him with vividness to the mind. Is it said, that God has expressly forbidden the use of images in our worship? But why was that prohibition laid on the Jews? For this express reason, that God had not presented himself to them in any form, which admitted of representation. Hear the language of Moses: "Take good heed lest ye make you a graven image, for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire."\* If, since that period, God has taken a body, then the reason of the prohibition has ceased; and if he took a body, among other purposes, that he might assist the weakness of the intellect, which needs a material form, then a statue, which lends so great an aid to the conception of an absent friend, is not only justified, but seems to be required.

This materializing and embodying of the Supreme Being, which is the essence of Trinitarianism, cannot but be adverse to a growing and exalted piety. Human and divine properties, being confounded in one being, lose

\* Deut. iv. 15, 16. — The arrangement of the text is a little changed, to put the reader immediately in possession of the meaning.

their distinctness. The splendors of the Godhead are dimmed. The worshippers of an incarnate Deity, through the frailty of their nature, are strongly tempted to fasten chiefly on his human attributes; and their devotion, instead of rising to the Infinite God, and taking the peculiar character which Infinity inspires, becomes rather a human affection, borrowing much of its fervor from the ideas of suffering, blood, and death. It is indeed possible, that this Godman (to use the strange phraseology of Trinitarians) may excite the mind more easily, than a purely spiritual divinity; just as a tragedy, addressed to the eye and ear, will interest the multitude more than the contemplation of the most exalted character. But the emotions, which are the most easily roused, are not the profoundest or most enduring. This human love, inspired by a human God, though at first more fervid, cannot grow and spread through the soul, like the reverential attachment, which an infinite, spiritual Father awakens. Refined conceptions of God, though more slowly attained, have a more quickening and all-pervading energy, and admit of perpetual accessions of brightness, life, and strength.

True, we shall be told, that Trinitarianism has converted only one of its three persons into a human Deity, and that the other two remain purely spiritual beings. But who does not know, that man will attach himself most strongly to the God who has become a man? Is not this even a duty, if the Divinity has taken a body to place himself within the reach of human comprehension and sympathy? That the Trinitarian's views of the Divinity will be colored more by his visible, tangible, corporeal God, than by those persons of the Trinity, who remain comparatively hidden in their invisible and spiritual essence, is so accord-

ant with the principles of our nature, as to need no labored proof.

My friends, hold fast the doctrine of a purely spiritual divinity. It is one of the great supports and instruments of a vital piety. It brings God near, as no other doctrine can. One of the leading purposes of Christianity, is to give us an ever-growing sense of God's immediate presence, a consciousness of him in our souls. Now, just as far as corporeal or limited attributes enter into our conception of him, we remove him from us. He becomes an outward, distant being, instead of being viewed and felt as dwelling in the soul itself. It is an unspeakable benefit of the doctrine of a purely spiritual God, that he can be regarded as inhabiting, filling our spiritual nature ; and through this union with our minds, he can and does become the object of an intimacy and friendship, such as no embodied being can call forth.

III. Unitarianism is the system most favorable to piety, because it presents a distinct and intelligible object of worship, a being, whose nature, whilst inexpressibly sublime, is yet simple and suited to human apprehension. An infinite Father is the most exalted of all conceptions, and yet the least perplexing. It involves no incongruous ideas. It is illustrated by analogies from our own nature. It coincides with that fundamental law of the intellect, through which we demand a cause proportioned to effects. It is also as interesting as it is rational ; so that it is peculiarly congenial with the improved mind. The sublime simplicity of God, as he is taught in Unitarianism, by relieving the understanding from perplexity, and by placing him within the reach of thought and affection, gives him peculiar power over the soul. Trinitarianism, on the



other hand, is a riddle. Men call it a mystery ; but it is mysterious, not like the great truths of religion, by its vastness and grandeur, but by the irreconcilable ideas which it involves. One God, consisting of three persons or agents, is so strange a being, so unlike our own minds, and all others with which we hold intercourse, is so misty, so incongruous, so contradictory, that he cannot be apprehended with that distinctness and that feeling of reality, which belong to the opposite system. Such a heterogeneous being, who is at the same moment one and many ; who includes in his own nature the relations of Father and Son, or, in other words, is Father and Son to himself ; who, in one of his persons, is at the same moment the supreme God and a mortal man, omniscient and ignorant, almighty and impotent ; such a being is certainly the most puzzling and distracting object ever presented to human thought. Trinitarianism, instead of teaching an intelligible God, offers to the mind a strange compound of hostile attributes, bearing plain marks of those ages of darkness, when Christianity shed but a faint ray, and the diseased fancy teemed with prodigies and unnatural creations. In contemplating a being, who presents such different and inconsistent aspects, the mind finds nothing to rest upon ; and instead of receiving distinct and harmonious impressions, is disturbed by shifting, unsettled images. To commune with such a being must be as hard, as to converse with a man of three different countenances, speaking with three different tongues. The believer in this system must forget it, when he prays, or he could find no repose in devotion. Who can compare it in distinctness, reality, and power, with the simple doctrine of One Infinite Father ?

IV. Unitarianism promotes a fervent and enlightened



piety, by asserting the absolute and unbounded perfection of God's character. This is the highest service which can be rendered to mankind. Just and generous conceptions of the Divinity are the soul's true wealth. To spread these, is to contribute more effectually, than by any other agency, to the progress and happiness of the intelligent creation. To obscure God's glory is to do greater wrong, than to blot out the sun. The character and influence of a religion must answer to the views which it gives of the Divinity ; and there is a plain tendency in that system, which manifests the divine perfections most resplendently, to awaken the sublimest and most blessed piety.

Now Trinitarianism has a fatal tendency to degrade the character of the Supreme Being, though its advocates, I am sure, intend no such wrong. By multiplying divine persons, it takes from each the glory of independent, all-sufficient, absolute perfection. This may be shown in various particulars. And in the first place, the very idea, that three persons in the divinity are in any degree important, implies and involves the imperfection of each ; for it is plain, that if one divine person possesses all possible power, wisdom, love, and happiness, nothing will be gained to himself or to the creation by joining him with two, or two hundred other persons. To say that he needs others for any purpose or in any degree, is to strip him of independent and all-sufficient majesty. If our Father in Heaven, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not of himself sufficient to all the wants of his creation ; if, by his union with other persons, he can accomplish any good to which he is not of himself equal ; or if he thus acquires a claim to the least degree of trust or hope, to which he is not of himself entitled by his own independent attri-

butes ; then it is plain, he is not a being of infinite and absolute perfection. Now Trinitarianism teaches, that the highest good accrues to the human race from the existence of three divine persons, sustaining different offices and relations to the world ; and it regards the Unitarian as subverting the foundation of human hope, by asserting that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus is alone and singly God. Thus it derogates from his infinite glory.

In the next place, Trinitarianism degrades the character of the Supreme Being, by laying its disciples under the necessity of making such a distribution of offices and relations among the three persons, as will serve to designate and distinguish them ; for in this way it interferes with the sublime conceptions of One Infinite Person, in whom all glories are concentrated. If we are required to worship three persons, we must view them in different lights, or they will be mere repetitions of each other, mere names and sounds, presenting no objects, conveying no meaning to the mind. Some appropriate character, some peculiar acts, feelings, and relations must be ascribed to each. In other words, the glory of all must be shorn, that some special distinguishing lustre may be thrown on each. Accordingly, creation is associated peculiarly with the conception of the Father ; satisfaction for human guilt with that of the Son ; whilst sanctification, the noblest work of all, is given to the Holy Spirit as his more particular work. By a still more fatal distribution, the work of justice, the office of vindicating the rights of the Divinity, falls peculiarly to the Father, whilst the loveliness of interposing mercy clothes peculiarly the person of the Son. By this unhappy influence of Trinitarianism, from which common minds at least cannot escape, the splendors of the

Godhead, being scattered among three objects, instead of being united in One Infinite Father, are dimmed; and he, whose mind is thoroughly and practically possessed by this system, can hardly conceive the effulgence of glory in which the one God offers himself to a pious believer in his strict unity.

But the worst has not been told. I observe, then, in the third place, that if Three Divine Persons are believed in, such an administration or government of the world must be ascribed to them, as will furnish them with a sphere of operation. No man will admit three persons into his creed, without finding a use for them. Now it is an obvious remark, that a system of the universe, which involves and demands more than one Infinite Agent, must be wild, extravagant, and unworthy the perfect God; because there is no possible or conceivable good, to which such an agent is not adequate. Accordingly we find Trinitarianism connecting itself with a scheme of administration, exceedingly derogatory to the divine character. It teaches, that the Infinite Father saw fit to put into the hands of our first parents the character and condition of their whole progeny; and that, through one act of disobedience, the whole race bring with them into being a corrupt nature, or are born depraved. It teaches, that the offences of a short life, though begun and spent under this disastrous influence, merit endless punishment, and that God's law threatens this infinite penalty; and that man is thus burdened with a guilt, which no sufferings of the created universe can expiate, which nothing but the sufferings of an Infinite Being can purge away. In this condition of human nature, Trinitarianism finds a sphere of action for its different persons. I am aware that some

Trinitarians, on hearing this statement of their system, may reproach me with ascribing to them the errors of Calvinism, a system which they abhor as much as ourselves. But none of the peculiarities of Calvinism enter into this exposition. I have given what I understand to be the leading features of Trinitarianism all the world over; and the benevolent professors of that faith, who recoil from this statement, must blame not the preacher, but the creeds and establishments by which these doctrines are diffused. For ourselves, we look with horror and grief on the views of God's government, which are naturally and intimately united with Trinitarianism. They take from us our Father in heaven, and substitute a stern and unjust lord. Our filial love and reverence rise up against them. We say to the Trinitarian, touch any thing but the perfections of God. Cast no stain on that spotless purity and loveliness. We can endure any errors but those, which subvert or unsettle the conviction of God's paternal goodness. Urge not upon us a system, which makes existence a curse, and wraps the universe in gloom. Leave us the cheerful light, the free and healthful atmosphere, of a liberal and rational faith; the ennobling and consoling influences of the doctrine, which nature and revelation in blessed concord teach us, of One Father of unbounded and inexhaustible love.

V. Unitarianism is peculiarly favorable to piety, because it accords with nature, with the world around and the world within us; and through this accordance it gives aid to nature, and receives aid from it, in impressing the mind with God. We live in the midst of a glorious universe, which was meant to be a witness and a preacher of the Divinity; and a revelation from God may be expected to



be in harmony with this system, and to carry on a common ministry with it in lifting the soul to God. Now Unitarianism is in accordance with nature. It teaches One Father, and so does creation, the more it is explored. Philosophy, in proportion as it extends its views of the universe, sees in it, more and more, a sublime and beautiful unity, and multiplies proofs, that all things have sprung from one intelligence, one power, one love. The whole outward creation proclaims to the Unitarian the truth in which he delights. So does his own soul. But neither nature nor the soul bears one trace of Three Divine Persons. Nature is no Trinitarian. It gives not a hint, not a glimpse, of a tri-personal author. Trinitarianism is a confined system, shut up in a few texts, a few written lines, where many of the wisest minds have failed to discover it. It is not inscribed on the heavens and the earth, not borne on every wind, not resounding and reëchoing through the universe. The sun and stars say nothing of a God of three persons. They all speak of the One Father whom *we* adore. To *our* ears, one and the same voice comes from God's word and works, a full and swelling strain, growing clearer, louder, more thrilling as we listen, and with one blessed influence lifting up our souls to the Almighty Father.

This accordance between nature and revelation increases the power of both over the mind. Concurring as they do in one impression they make that impression deeper. To men of reflection, the conviction of the reality of religion is exceedingly heightened, by a perception of harmony in the views of it which they derive from various sources. Revelation is never received with so intimate a persuasion of its truth, as when it is seen to conspire to

the same ends and impressions, for which all other things are made. It is no small objection to Trinitarianism, that it is an insulated doctrine, that it reveals a God whom we meet nowhere in the universe. Three Divine Persons, I repeat it, are found only in a few texts, and those so dark, that the gifted minds of Milton, Newton, and Locke could not find them there. Nature gives them not a whisper of evidence. And can they be as real and powerful to the mind, as that One Father, whom the general strain and common voice of Scripture, and the universal voice of nature call us to adore?

VI. Unitarianism favors piety by opening the mind to new and ever-enlarging views of God. Teaching, as it does, the same God with nature, it leads us to seek him in nature. It does not shut us up in the written word, precious as that manifestation of the Divinity is. It considers revelation, not as independent on his other means of instruction; not as a separate agent; but as a part of the great system of God for enlightening and elevating the human soul; as intimately joined with creation and providence, and intended to concur with them; and as given to assist us in reading the volume of the universe. Thus Unitarianism, where its genuine influence is experienced, tends to enrich and fertilize the mind; opens it to new lights, wherever they spring up; and by combining, makes more efficient, the means of religious knowledge. Trinitarianism, on the other hand, is a system which tends to confine the mind; to shut it up in what is written; to diminish its interest in the universe; and to disincline it to bright and enlarged views of God's works. This effect will be explained, in the first place, if we consider, that the peculiarities of Trinitarianism differ so much from

the teachings of the universe, that he, who attaches himself to the one, will be in danger of losing his interest in the other. The ideas of Three Divine Persons, of God clothing himself in flesh, of the infinite Creator saving the guilty by transferring their punishment to an innocent being, these ideas cannot easily be made to coalesce in the mind with that, which nature gives, of One Almighty Father and Unbounded Spirit, whom no worlds can contain, and whose vicegerent in the human breast pronounces it a crime, to lay the penalties of vice on the pure and unoffending.

But Trinitarianism has a still more positive influence in shutting the mind against improving views from the universe. It tends to throw gloom over God's works. Imagining that Christ is to be exalted, by giving him an exclusive agency in enlightening and recovering mankind, it is tempted to disparage other lights and influences; and for the purpose of magnifying his salvation, it inclines to exaggerate the darkness and desperateness of man's present condition. The mind, thus impressed, naturally leans to those views of nature and of society, which will strengthen the ideas of desolation and guilt. It is tempted to aggravate the miseries of life, and to see in them only the marks of divine displeasure and punishing justice; and overlooks their obvious fitness and design to awaken our powers, exercise our virtues, and strengthen our social ties. In like manner it exaggerates the sins of men, that the need of an Infinite atonement may be maintained. Some of the most affecting tokens of God's love within and around us are obscured by this gloomy theology. The glorious faculties of the soul, its high aspirations, its sensibility to the great and good in character, its sympathy

with disinterested and suffering virtue, its benevolent and religious instincts, its thirst for happiness not found on earth, these are overlooked or thrown into the shade, that they may not disturb the persuasion of man's natural corruption. Ingenuity is employed to disparage what is interesting in the human character. Whilst the bursts of passion in the new-born child are gravely urged, as indications of a native rooted corruption ; its bursts of affection, its sweet smile, its innocent and irrepressible joy, its loveliness and beauty, are not listened to, though they plead more eloquently its alliance with higher natures. The sacred and tender affections of home ; the unwearied watchings and cheerful sacrifices of parents ; the reverential, grateful assiduity of children, smoothing an aged father's or mother's descent to the grave ; woman's love, stronger than death ; the friendship of brothers and sisters ; the anxious affection, which tends around the bed of sickness ; the subdued voice, which breathes comfort into the mourner's heart ; all the endearing offices, which shed a serene light through our dwellings ; these are explained away by the thorough advocates of this system, so as to include no real virtue, so as to consist with a natural aversion to goodness. Even the higher efforts of disinterested benevolence, and the most unaffected expressions of piety, if not connected with what is called " the true faith," are, by the most rigid disciples of the doctrine which I oppose, resolved into the passion for distinction, or some other working of " unsanctified nature." Thus Trinitarianism and its kindred doctrines have a tendency to veil God's goodness, to sully his fairest works, to dim the lustre of those innocent and pure affections, which a divine breath kindles in the soul, to blight the beauty and



freshness of creation, and in this way to consume the very nutriment of piety. We know, and rejoice to know, that in multitudes this tendency is counteracted by a cheerful temperament, a benevolent nature, and a strength of gratitude, which bursts the shackles of a melancholy system. But from the nature of the doctrine, the tendency exists and is strong ; and an impartial observer will often discern it resulting in gloomy, depressing views of life and the universe.

Trinitarianism, by thus tending to exclude bright and enlarging views of the creation, seems to me not only to chill the heart, but to injure the understanding as far as moral and religious truth is concerned. It does not send the mind far and wide for new and elevating objects ; and we have here one explanation of the barrenness and feebleness, by which theological writings are so generally marked. It is not wonderful, that the prevalent theology should want vitality and enlargement of thought, for it does not accord with the perfections of God and the spirit of the universe. It has not its root in eternal truth ; but is a narrow, technical, artificial system, the fabrication of unrefined ages, and consequently incapable of being blended with the new lights which are spreading over the most interesting subjects, and of being incorporated with the results and anticipations of original and progressive minds. It stands apart in the mind, instead of seizing upon new truths, and converting them into its own nutriment. With few exceptions, the Trinitarian theology of the present day is greatly deficient in freshness of thought, and in power to awaken the interest and to meet the intellectual and spiritual wants of thinking men. I see indeed superior minds and great minds

among the adherents of the prevalent system ; but they seem to me to move in chains, and to fulfil poorly their high function of adding to the wealth of the human intellect. In theological discussion, they remind me more of Sampson grinding in the narrow mill of the Philistines, than of that undaunted champion achieving victories for God's people, and enlarging the bounds of their inheritance. Now a system, which has a tendency to confine the mind, and to impair its sensibility to the manifestations of God, in the universe, is so far unfriendly to piety, to a bright, joyous, hopeful, ever-growing love of the Creator. It tends to generate and nourish a religion of a melancholy tone, such, I apprehend, as now predominates in the Christian world.

VII. Unitarianism promotes piety by the high place, which it assigns to piety in the character and work of Jesus Christ. What is it which the Unitarian regards as the chief glory of the character of Christ? I answer, his filial devotion, the entireness with which he surrendered himself to the will and benevolent purposes of God. The piety of Jesus, which, on the supposition of his Supreme Divinity, is a subordinate and incongruous, is, to us, his prominent and crowning, attribute. We place his "oneness with God," not in an unintelligible unity of essence, but in unity of mind and heart, in the strength of his love, through which he renounced every separate interest, and identified himself with his Father's designs. In other words, filial piety, the consecration of his whole being to the benevolent will of his Father, this is the mild glory in which he always offers himself to our minds ; and, of consequence, all our sympathies with him, all our love and veneration towards him, are so many forms of

delight in a pious character, and our whole knowledge of him incites us to a like surrender of our whole nature and existence to God.

In the next place, Unitarianism teaches, that the highest work or office of Christ is to call forth and strengthen piety in the human breast, and thus it sets before us this character as the chief acquisition and end of our being. To us, the great glory of Christ's mission consists in the power, with which he "reveals the Father," and establishes the "kingdom or reign of God within" the soul. By the crown, which he wears, we understand the eminence which he enjoys in the most beneficent work in the universe, that of bringing back the lost mind to the knowledge, love, and likeness of its Creator. With these views of Christ's office, nothing can seem to us so important as an enlightened and profound piety, and we are quickened to seek it, as the perfection and happiness, to which nature and redemption jointly summon us.

Now we maintain, that Trinitarianism obscures and weakens these views of Christ's character and work; and this it does, by insisting perpetually on others of an incongruous, discordant nature. It diminishes the power of his piety. Making him, as it does, the Supreme Being, and placing him as an equal on his Father's throne, it turns the mind from him as the meekest worshipper of God; throws into the shade, as of very inferior worth, his self-denying obedience; and gives us other grounds for revering him, than his entire homage, his fervent love, his cheerful self-sacrifice to the Universal Parent. There is a plain incongruity in the belief of his Supreme Godhead with the ideas of filial piety and exemplary devotion. The mind, which has been taught to regard him as of

equal majesty and authority with the Father, cannot easily feel the power of his character as the affectionate Son, whose meat it was to do his Father's will. The mind, accustomed to make him the Ultimate Object of worship, cannot easily recognize in him the pattern of that worship, the guide to the Most High. The characters are incongruous, and their union perplexing, so that neither exerts its full energy on the mind.

Trinitarianism also exhibits the work, as well as character of Christ, in lights less favorable to piety. It does not make the promotion of piety his chief end. It teaches, that the highest purpose of his mission was to reconcile God to man, not man to God. It teaches, that the most formidable obstacle to human happiness lies in the claims and threatenings of divine justice. Hence it leads men to prize Christ more, for answering these claims and averting these threatenings, than for awakening in the human soul sentiments of love towards its Father in heaven. Accordingly, multitudes seem to prize pardon more than piety, and think it a greater boon to escape, through Christ's sufferings, the fire of hell, than to receive, through his influence, the spirit of heaven, the spirit of devotion. Is such a system propitious to a generous and ever-growing piety?

If I may be allowed a short digression, I would conclude this head with the general observation, that we deem our views of Jesus Christ more interesting than those of Trinitarianism. We feel that we should lose much, by exchanging the distinct character and mild radiance, with which he offers himself to our minds, for the confused and irreconcilable glories with which that system labors to invest him. According to Unitarianism, he is a being who



may be understood, for he is one mind, one conscious nature. According to the opposite faith, he is an inconceivable compound of two most dissimilar minds, joining in one person a finite and infinite nature, a soul weak and ignorant, and a soul almighty and omniscient. And is such a being a proper object for human thought and affection? I add, as another important consideration, that to us Jesus, instead of being the second of three obscure unintelligible persons, is first and preëminent in the sphere in which he acts, and is thus the object of a distinct attachment, which he shares with no equals or rivals. To us, he is first of the sons of God, the Son by peculiar nearness and likeness to the Father. He is first of all the ministers of God's mercy and beneficence, and through him the largest stream of bounty flows to the creation. He is first in God's favor and love, the most accepted of worshippers, the most prevalent of intercessors. In this mighty universe, framed to be a mirror of its author, we turn to Jesus as the brightest image of God, and gratefully yield him a place in our souls, second only to the Infinite Father, to whom he himself directs our supreme affection.

VIII. I now proceed to a great topic. Unitarianism promotes piety, by meeting the wants of man as a sinner. The wants of the sinner may be expressed almost in one word. He wants assurances of mercy in his Creator. He wants pledges, that God is love in its purest form, that is, that He has a goodness so disinterested, free, full, strong, and immutable, that the ingratitude and disobedience of his creatures cannot overcome it. This unconquerable love, which in Scripture is denominated grace, and which waits not for merit to call it forth, but flows out to the most guilty, is the sinner's only hope, and it is

fitted to call forth the most devoted gratitude. Now this grace or mercy of God, which seeks the lost, and receives and blesses the returning child, is proclaimed by that faith, which we advocate, with a clearness and energy, which cannot be surpassed. Unitarianism will not listen for a moment to the common errors, by which this bright attribute is obscured. It will not hear of a vindictive wrath in God, which must be quenched by blood; or of a justice, which binds his mercy with an iron chain, until its demands are satisfied to the full. It will not hear that God needs any foreign influence to awaken his mercy; but teaches, that the yearnings of the tenderest human parent towards a lost child are but a faint image of God's deep and overflowing compassion towards erring man. This essential and unchangeable propensity of the divine mind to forgiveness, the Unitarian beholds shining forth through the whole word of God, and especially in the mission and revelation of Jesus Christ, who lived and died to make manifest the inexhaustible plenitude of divine grace; and, aided by revelation, he sees this attribute of God everywhere, both around him and within him. He sees it in the sun which shines, and the rain which descends, on the evil and unthankful; in the peace, which returns to the mind in proportion to its return to God and duty; in the sentiment of compassion, which springs up spontaneously in the human breast towards the fallen and lost; and in the moral instinct, which teaches us to cherish this compassion as a sacred principle, as an emanation of God's infinite love. In truth, Unitarianism asserts so strongly the mercy of God, that the reproach thrown upon it is, that it takes from the sinner the dread of punishment; a reproach wholly without foundation; for our

system teaches that God's mercy is not an instinctive tenderness, which cannot inflict pain ; but an all-wise love, which desires the true and lasting good of its object, and consequently desires first for the sinner that restoration to purity, without which, shame, and suffering, and exile from God and heaven are of necessity and unalterably his doom. Thus Unitarianism holds forth God's grace and forgiving goodness most resplendently ; and by this manifestation of him, it tends to awaken a tender and confiding piety ; an ingenuous love, which mourns that it has offended ; an ingenuous aversion to sin, not because sin brings punishment, but because it separates the mind from this merciful Father.

Now we object to Trinitarianism, that it obscures the mercy of God. It does so in various ways. We have already seen, that it gives such views of God's government, that we can hardly conceive of this attribute as entering into his character. Mercy to the sinner is the principle of love or benevolence in its highest form ; and surely this cannot be expected from a being who brings us into existence burdened with hereditary guilt, and who threatens with endless punishment and woe the heirs of so frail and feeble a nature. With such a Creator, the idea of mercy cannot coalesce ; and I will say more, that under such a government, man would need no mercy ; for he would owe no allegiance to such a Maker, and could not of course contract the guilt of violating it ; and without guilt, no grace or pardon would be wanted. The severity of this system would place him on the ground of an injured being. The wrong would lie on the side of the Creator.

In the next place, Trinitarianism obscures God's mercy, by the manner in which it supposes pardon to be commu-



nicated. It teaches that God remits the punishment of the offender, in consequence of receiving an equivalent from an innocent person ; that the sufferings of the sinner are removed by a full satisfaction made to divine justice in the sufferings of a substitute. And is this “ the quality of mercy ? ” What means forgiveness, but the reception of the returning child through the strength of parental love ? This doctrine invests the Saviour with a claim of merit, with a right to the remission of the sins of his followers ; and represents God’s reception of the penitent as a recompense due to the worth of his Son. And is mercy, which means free and undeserved love, made more manifest, more resplendent, by the introduction of merit and right as the ground of our salvation ? Could a surer expedient be invented for obscuring its freeness, and for turning the sinner’s gratitude from the sovereign who demands, to the sufferer who offers, full satisfaction for his guilt ?

I know it is said, that Trinitarianism magnifies God’s mercy, because it teaches, that he himself provided the substitute for the guilty. But I reply, that the work here ascribed to mercy is not the most appropriate, nor most fitted to manifest it and impress it on the heart. This may be made apparent by familiar illustrations. Suppose that a creditor, through compassion to certain debtors, should persuade a benevolent and opulent man to pay him in their stead. Would not the debtors see a greater mercy, and feel a weightier obligation, if they were to receive a free, gratuitous release ? And will not their chief gratitude stray beyond the creditor to the benevolent substitute ? Or suppose that a parent, unwilling to inflict a penalty on a disobedient but feeble child, should



persuade a stronger child to bear it. Would not the offender see a more touching mercy in a free forgiveness, springing immediately from a parent's heart, than in this circuitous remission? And will he not be tempted to turn with his strongest love to the generous sufferer? In this process of substitution, of which Trinitarianism boasts so loudly, the mercy of God becomes complicated with the rights and merits of the substitute, and is a more distant cause of our salvation. These rights and merits are nearer, more visible, and more than divide the glory with grace and mercy in our rescue. They turn the mind from Divine Goodness as the only spring of its happiness, and only rock of its hope. Now this is to deprive piety of one of its chief means of growth and joy. Nothing should stand between the soul and God's mercy. Nothing should share with mercy the work of our salvation. Christ's intercession should ever be regarded as an application to love and mercy, not as a demand of justice, not as a claim of merit. I grieve to say, that Christ, as now viewed by multitudes, hides the lustre of that very attribute, which it is his great purpose to display. I fear, that to many, Jesus wears the glory of a more winning, tender mercy, than his Father, and that he is regarded as the sinner's chief resource. Is this the way to invigorate piety?

Trinitarians imagine, that there is one view of their system, peculiarly fitted to give peace and hope to the sinner, and consequently to promote gratitude and love. It is this. They say, it provides an Infinite substitute for the sinner, than which nothing can give greater relief to the burdened conscience. Jesus, being the second person of the Trinity, was able to make infinite satisfaction for sin; and what, they ask, in Unitarianism, can com-

pare with this ? I have time only for two brief replies. And first, this doctrine of an Infinite satisfaction, or, as it is improperly called, of an Infinite atonement, subverts, instead of building up, hope ; because it argues infinite severity in the government which requires it. Did I believe, what Trinitarianism teaches, that not the least transgression, not even the first sin of the dawning mind of the child, could be remitted without an infinite expiation, I should feel myself living under a legislation unspeakably dreadful, under laws written, like Draco's, in blood ; and instead of thanking the sovereign for providing an infinite substitute, I should shudder at the attributes, which render this expedient necessary. It is commonly said, that an infinite atonement is needed to make due and deep impressions of the evil of sin. But he, who framed all souls and gave them their susceptibilities, ought not to be thought so wanting in goodness and wisdom, as to have constituted a universe, which demands so dreadful and degrading a method of enforcing obedience, as the penal sufferings of a God. This doctrine of an Infinite substitute, suffering the penalty of sin, to manifest God's wrath against sin, and thus to support his government, is, I fear, so familiar to us all, that its severe character is overlooked. Let me then set it before you, in new terms, and by a new illustration ; and if in so doing, I may wound the feelings of some who hear me, I beg them to believe, that I do it with pain, and from no impulse but a desire to serve the cause of truth. Suppose, then, that a teacher should come among you, and should tell you, that the Creator, in order to pardon his own children, had erected a gallows in the centre of the universe, and had publicly executed upon it, in room of the offenders, an Infinite Being, the partaker

of his own Supreme Divinity ; suppose him to declare, that this execution was appointed, as a most conspicuous and terrible manifestation of God's justice, and of the infinite woe denounced by his law ; and suppose him to add, that all beings in heaven and earth are required to fix their eyes on this fearful sight, as the most powerful enforcement of obedience and virtue. Would you not tell him that he calumniated his Maker ? Would you not say to him, that this central gallows threw gloom over the universe ; that the spirit of a government, whose very acts of pardon were written in such blood, was terror, not paternal love ; and that the obedience, which needed to be upheld by this horrid spectacle, was nothing worth ? Would you not say to him, that even you, in this infancy and imperfection of your being, were capable of being wrought upon by nobler motives, and of hating sin through more generous views ; and that much more the angels, those pure flames of love, need not the gallows and an executed God, to confirm their loyalty ? You would all so feel at such teaching as I have supposed ; and yet how does this differ from the popular doctrine of atonement ? According to this doctrine, we have an Infinite Being sentenced to suffer as a substitute the death of the cross, a punishment more ignominious and agonizing than the gallows, a punishment reserved for slaves and the vilest malefactors ; and he suffers this punishment, that he may show forth the terrors of God's law, and strike a dread of sin through the universe. I am indeed aware that multitudes, who profess this doctrine, are not accustomed to bring it to their minds distinctly in this light ; that they do not ordinarily regard the death of Christ, as a criminal execution, as an infinitely dreadful infliction of justice, as



intended to show, that, without an infinite satisfaction, they must hope nothing from God. Their minds turn by a generous instinct from these appalling views, to the love, the disinterestedness, the moral grandeur and beauty of the sufferer ; and through such thoughts they make the cross a source of peace, gratitude, love, and hope ; thus affording a delightful exemplification of the power of the human mind to attach itself to what is good and purifying in the most irrational system. Not a few may shudder at the illustration which I have here given ; but in what respects it is unjust to the popular doctrine of atonement, I cannot discern. I grieve to shock sincere Christians, of whatever name ; but I grieve more for the corruption of our common faith, which I have now felt myself bound to expose.

I have a second objection to this doctrine of Infinite atonement. When examined minutely, and freed from ambiguous language, it vanishes into air. It is wholly delusion. The Trinitarian tells me, that, according to his system, we have an infinite substitute ; that the Infinite God was pleased to bear our punishment, and consequently, that pardon is made sure. But I ask him, Do I understand you ? Do you mean that the Great God, who never changes, whose happiness is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, that this Eternal Being really bore the penalty of my sins, really suffered and died ? Every pious man, when pressed by this question, answers, No. What, then, does the doctrine of Infinite atonement mean ? Why, this ; that God took into union with himself our nature, that is, a human body and soul ; and these bore the suffering for our sins ; and, through his union with these, God may be said to have borne it himself. Thus this vaunted



system goes out—in words. The Infinite victim proves to be a frail man, and God's share in the sacrifice is a mere fiction. I ask with solemnity, Can this doctrine give one moment's ease to the conscience of an unbiassed, thinking man? Does it not unsettle all hope, by making the whole religion suspicious and unsure? I am compelled to say, that I see in it no impression of majesty, or wisdom, or love, nothing worthy of a God; and when I compare it with that nobler faith, which directs our eyes and hearts to God's essential mercy, as our only hope, I am amazed that any should ascribe to it superior efficacy, as a religion for sinners, as a means of filling the soul with pious trust and love. I know, indeed, that some will say, that, in giving up an infinite atonement, I deprive myself of all hope of divine favor. To such, I would say, You do wrong to God's mercy. On that mercy I cast myself without a fear. I, indeed, desire Christ to intercede for me. I regard his relation to me as God's kindest appointment. Through him, "grace and truth come" to me from heaven, and I look forward to his friendship, as among the highest blessings of my whole future being. But I cannot, and dare not ask him, to offer an infinite satisfaction for my sins; to appease the wrath of God; to reconcile the Universal Father to his own offspring; to open to me those arms of Divine mercy, which have encircled and borne me from the first moment of my being. The essential and unbounded mercy of my Creator is the foundation of my hope, and a broader and surer the universe cannot give me.

IX. I now proceed to the last consideration, which the limits of this discourse will permit me to urge. It has been more than once suggested, but deserves to be dis-

tinctly stated. I observe, then, that Unitarianism promotes piety, because it is a rational religion. By this I do not mean that its truths can be fully comprehended; for there is not an object in nature or religion, which has not innumerable connections and relations beyond our grasp of thought. I mean, that its doctrines are consistent with one another, and with all established truth. Unitarianism is in harmony with the great and clear principles of revelation; with the laws and powers of human nature; with the dictates of the moral sense; with the noblest instincts and highest aspirations of the soul; and with the lights, which the universe throws on the character of its author. We can hold this doctrine without self-contradiction, without rebelling against our rational and moral powers, without putting to silence the divine monitor in the breast. And this is an unspeakable benefit; for a religion, thus coincident with reason, conscience, and our whole spiritual being, has the foundations of universal empire in the breast; and the heart, finding no resistance in the intellect, yields itself wholly, cheerfully, without doubts or misgivings, to the love of its Creator.

To Trinitarianism we object, what has always been objected to it, that it contradicts and degrades reason, and thus exposes the mind to the worst delusions. Some of its advocates, more courageous than prudent, have even recommended "the prostration of the understanding" as preparatory to its reception. Its chief doctrine is an outrage on our rational nature. Its three persons, who constitute its God, must either be frittered away into three unmeaning distinctions, into sounds signifying nothing; or they are three conscious agents, who cannot, by any human art or metaphysical device, be made to coalesce into

one being ; who cannot be really viewed as one mind, having one consciousness and one will. Now a religious system, the cardinal principle of which offends the understanding, very naturally conforms itself throughout to this prominent feature, and becomes prevalently irrational. He, who is compelled to defend his faith in any particular by the plea, that human reason is so depraved through the fall, as to be an inadequate judge of religion, and that God is honored by our reception of what shocks the intellect, seems to have no defence left against accumulated absurdities. According to these principles, the fanatic, who exclaimed, " I believe, because it is impossible," had a fair title to canonization. Reason is too Godlike a faculty, to be insulted with impunity. Accordingly Trinitarianism, as we have seen, links itself with several degrading errors ; and its most natural alliance is with Calvinism, that cruel faith, which, stripping God of mercy and man of power, has made Christianity an instrument of torture to the timid, and an object of doubt or scorn to hardier spirits. I repeat it, a doctrine, which violates reason like the Trinity, prepares its advocates, in proportion as it is incorporated into the mind, for worse and worse delusion. It breaks down the distinctions and barriers between truth and falsehood. It creates a diseased taste for prodigies, fictions, and exaggerations, for startling mysteries, and wild dreams of enthusiasm. It destroys the relish for the simple, chaste, serene beauties of truth. Especially when the prostration of understanding is taught as an act of piety, we cannot wonder, that the grossest superstitions should be devoured, and that the credulity of the multitude should keep pace with the forgeries of imposture and fanaticism. The history of the church is the best comment on the ef-

fects of divorcing reason from religion ; and if the present age is disburdened of many of the superstitions, under which Christianity and human nature groaned for ages, it owes its relief in no small degree to the reinstating of reason in her long-violated rights.

The injury to religion, from irrational doctrines when thoroughly believed, is immense. The human soul has a unity. Its various faculties are adapted to one another. One life pervades it ; and its beauty, strength, and growth, depend on nothing so much, as on the harmony and joint action of all its principles. To wound and degrade it in any of its powers, and especially in the noble and distinguishing power of reason, is to inflict on it universal injury. No notion is more false, than that the heart is to thrive by dwarfing the intellect ; that perplexing doctrines are the best food of piety ; that religion flourishes most luxuriantly in mists and darkness. Reason was given for God as its great object ; and for him it should be kept sacred, invigorated, clarified, protected from human usurpation, and inspired with a meek self-reverence.

The soul never acts so effectually or joyfully, as when all its powers and affections conspire ; as when thought and feeling, reason and sensibility, are called forth together by one great and kindling object. It will never devote itself to God with its whole energy, whilst its guiding faculty sees in him a being to shock and confound it. We want a harmony in our inward nature. We want a piety, which will join light and fervor, and on which the intellectual power will look benignantly. We want religion to be so exhibited, that in the clearest moments of the intellect, its signatures of truth will grow brighter ; that instead of tottering, it will gather strength and stability from the progress of the human mind. These



wants we believe to be met by Unitarian Christianity, and therefore we prize it as the best friend of piety.

I have thus stated the chief grounds, on which I rest the claim of Unitarianism to the honor of promoting an enlightened, profound, and happy piety.

Am I now asked, why we prize our system, and why we build churches for its inculcation? If I may be allowed to express myself in the name of conscientious Unitarians, who apply their doctrine to their own hearts and lives, I would reply thus : We prize and would spread our views, because we believe that they reveal God to us in greater glory, and bring us nearer to him, than any other. We are conscious of a deep want, which the creation cannot supply, the want of a Perfect Being, on whom the strength of our love may be centred, and of an Almighty Father, to whom our weaknesses, imperfections, and sorrows may find resource ; and such a Being and Father, Unitarian Christianity sets before us. For this we prize it above all price. We can part with every other good. We can endure the darkening of life's fairest prospects. But this bright, consoling doctrine of One God, even the Father, is dearer than life, and we cannot let it go. Through this faith, every thing grows brighter to our view. Born of such a Parent, we esteem our existence an inestimable gift. We meet everywhere our Father, and his presence is as a sun shining on our path. We see him in his works, and hear his praise rising from every spot which we tread. We feel him near in our solitudes, and sometimes enjoy communion with him more tender than human friendship. We see him in our duties, and perform them more gladly, because they are the

best tribute we can offer our Heavenly Benefactor. Even the consciousness of sin, mournful as it is, does not subvert our peace ; for in the mercy of God, as made manifest in Jesus Christ, we see an inexhaustible fountain of strength, purity, and pardon for all who, in filial reliance, seek these heavenly gifts. Through this faith, we are conscious of a new benevolence springing up to our fellow-creatures, purer and more enlarged than natural affection. Towards all mankind we see a rich and free love flowing from the common Parent, and touched by this love, we are the friends of all. We compassionate the most guilty, and would win them back to God. Through this faith, we receive the happiness of an ever enlarging hope. There is no good too vast for us to anticipate for the universe or for ourselves, from such a Father as we believe in. We hope from him, what we deem his greatest gift, even the gift of his own Spirit, and the happiness of advancing forever in truth and virtue, in power and love, in union of mind with the Father and the Son. We are told, indeed, that our faith will not prove an anchor in the last hour. But we have known those, whose departure it has brightened ; and our experience of its power, in trial and peril, has proved it to be equal to all the wants of human nature. We doubt not, that, to its sincere followers, death will be a transition to the calm, pure, joyful mansions prepared by Christ for his disciples. There we expect to meet that great and good Deliverer. With the eye of faith, we already see him looking round him with celestial love on all of every name, who have imbibed his spirit. His spirit ; his loyal and entire devotion to the will of his Heavenly Father ; his universal, unconquerable benevolence, through which he freely gave from his pierced side

his blood, his life for the salvation of the world; this divine love, and not creeds, and names, and forms, will then be found to attract his supreme regard. This spirit we trust to see in multitudes of every sect and name; and we trust, too, that they, who now reproach us, will at that day recognize, in the dreaded Unitarian, this only badge of Christ, and will bid him welcome to the joy of our common Lord. We desire to glorify God, to promote a purer, nobler, happier piety. Even if we err in doctrine, we think, that these motives should shield us from reproach; should disarm that intolerance, which would exclude us from the church on earth, and from our Father's house in heaven.

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THE

APOSTLE PAUL A UNITARIAN.

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“I KEPT back nothing that was profitable unto you.” “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” \* These passages exhibit the manly and fearless principles on which Paul acted as a minister of Jesus Christ. The great talents, extended learning, and ardent zeal with which he went forward in the perilous way where duty called him, give him a claim to the first rank among the inspired apostles of our Saviour. We have no doubt that he was eminently faithful to his great trust. We may receive his testimony respecting the character and office of Jesus Christ, with entire confidence that it could not have been erroneous or defective in any important respect.

There are two senses in which Christ is said to be divine. One class of Christians believe that he is the eternal, self-existing God — that he “whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world,” is the same being who sent him — that he “who had all power given him in heaven and on earth,” is the same God who gave him that power.

Another class of Christians, called Unitarians, believe in Jesus not as the Supreme God, but as one “whom

\* Acts xx. 20, 27.

God hath highly exalted and made a Prince and a Saviour—head over all things to the church.” They call him a Divine messenger; but it is a divinity derived from God. His precepts were the precepts of God—his wisdom the wisdom of God—his power the power of God. The Unitarian then believes in Jesus Christ as a subordinate agent or representative of God, invested by him with Divine wisdom and power to save and bless mankind.

It is our object to show that Paul’s views of our Saviour correspond with this statement—or in other words, that he was a Unitarian. And for this purpose, it is necessary to review his *preaching* and his *writings*.

I. Let us examine his *preaching*, as we find it recorded by Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles. At that time the Gospels containing our Saviour’s history were not written. It was necessary therefore for preachers to relate this history, and inform their hearers distinctly who Jesus was, what he was, and what he had done, and taught, and suffered for man’s salvation. Paul professes to disclose the whole truth, and “keep back nothing profitable;” if therefore the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ is not formally stated in his preaching, there is a strong presumption that he did not believe it. But we need not rest on this presumption alone; it will be easy to show positive evidence that he regarded him as a subordinate agent. This apostle says, he became all things to all men; or, in modern phrase, he accommodated his instructions to the condition and prejudices of the people whom he addressed. He addressed the Jews, as a nation acquainted with the one true God. They had long be-



lieved, from their ancient prophets, that God would send a messenger for their deliverance, called the Messiah, or Anointed. But they had mistaken the meaning of the promises to which they trusted. They expected a prince in the pomp of earthly power, to wear an earthly crown, and deliver them, not from moral ruin and death, but from the yoke of the Romans, their foreign masters. They would gladly have welcomed Jesus as the Messiah, if he had promised to drive out his country's proud oppressors, raise the banner of independence, and reëstablish the throne of David in its long departed grandeur. But they would not receive as the messenger of God, him who had refused to be their king, and blasted their fondest hopes. They rejected with bitter scorn the meek and lowly Jesus, whose kingdom was not of this world. They were still less likely to admit his claims after he had suffered an ignominious death.

It was necessary therefore for the apostle, when he preached to Jews, to accommodate his arguments to their peculiar state of mind. He explained to them the spiritual nature and design of our Saviour's office, and proved from their sacred books, that this very Jesus whom they had crucified, was no other than the promised Messiah.

His first preaching recorded in Acts ix. was directed solely to this point. At Damascus, "He preached Christ in the synagogues, *that he is the Son of God*," or the Messiah.\* Again, "he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that *this is very Christ*" †—that is, the true Messiah whom they expected.

\* Acts ix. 20.

† Acts x. 22.

His next discourse to the Jews, of which we have any record, was at Antioch. He had the same object in view as before, and the author, Luke, gives an account of his method and course of argument.\* After the reading of the Scriptures, he addresses them as the chosen people of God; gives a sketch of their history to show his peculiar care of their nation down to the time of David; then he says, “of this man’s seed hath *God*, according to his promise, *raised* unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.” He then proceeds with the history of Jesus, comparing it with the ancient Scriptures, to prove that he is the Messiah. “When they had fulfilled all that was written of him they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre; but *God raised* him from the dead.”† The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is proved and powerfully urged as conclusive evidence, that he was the Messiah, long expected by the Jewish nation.

He finally adds, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man (Jesus Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified;” — believe what? that Christ is God? Nothing like it; but only the doctrine he had been teaching them, which, free as it is from Trinitarianism, he himself called the “word of salvation.”

Such as we have stated was the train of reasoning, which, as far as we are informed, Paul always employed in preaching the gospel to the Israelites. It went to prove the simple proposition, that Jesus was the Messiah; or, what means the same thing in the Greek language, the Christ. After having embraced this great truth, they

\* Acts xiii. 17-42.

† Acts xiii. 29-37.

were Christians in faith ; it remained only for them to become so in practical obedience to the gospel.

It is necessary now to consider what idea a Jew must have had of the Messiah, after Paul had thus explained his character and office, and proved from the Old Testament that Jesus of Nazareth was he. I have already stated the well-known fact, that this people had expected in him a temporal prince and deliverer. After the apostle had exposed this error, what new idea did they form of him ? This may be easily answered.

The term *Messiah*, or *Christ* literally means, the anointed. It originated in an ancient practice of anointing with oil one who was set apart or consecrated to an office. Now it is perfectly well known that the Jews supposed that their expected deliverer, whom they called, by way of eminence, *the Messiah*, would receive and fulfil his high office under the authority of Jehovah. They looked forward to him as God's most distinguished messenger to them. They invested him with high titles as the Son of God. But no Jew ever for a moment supposed that the Most High himself would come down to earth in human form as the Messiah. When the apostle therefore proved to them, that they were not to expect a temporal prince, but a spiritual one, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the true and long-expected Messiah, they could have received him only as a messenger or agent of God — not as the ever-living Jehovah, whom they had worshipped in the Holy of Holies. Paul knew that the Jewish converts to Christianity must regard our Saviour only as an agent, deriving his power and dignity from God, and he gives them no intimation that they were in an error. Nay, we

find him "testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks" that he had "kept nothing back that was profitable to them, nor shunned to declare all the counsel of God." But how could this be true if he had been commissioned to preach the doctrine of the Trinity? Would any Trinitarian preacher have thought that he had "declared all the counsel of God," if he had failed to inform his hearers that Jesus Christ was no other than God himself?

But Paul gives no intimation of such a doctrine; all he says is directly against it. He aims merely to establish two points — first, that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the promised Messiah — and second, that God had raised him from the dead by his own power. He reasons with the Jews on their own received opinions; his argument is as follows. You already believe from your sacred writings, that God will qualify and send for your deliverance, a personage called the Messiah, who will be obedient to his will, and as his representative accomplish his purposes of mercy. Now if you compare these promises, on which you rely, with the life, character, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who was crucified at Jerusalem, you will be convinced that he is the true Messiah. He was no impostor, for God raised him from the dead, he did not suffer his "holy one to see corruption." \*

Now had the Jews admitted fully all that Paul had told them, they were obviously as far as ever from believing that Jesus was the supreme God: the apostle knew that this must be the case, and yet he is willing to leave them in this state of mind. He not only does

\* Acts xiii. 37.



not tell them of our Saviour's underived divinity ; but all he does say is adapted to confirm them in the opposite belief. It is then certain, either that the inspired apostle did not believe that Jesus was God, or that he did not consider it profitable to state it to his hearers. If you choose the former alternative, you will of course adopt his opinions ; if you prefer the latter, we may ask why many Christian ministers are now reviled and denounced for not preaching a doctrine, which Paul did not think profitable ?

As the same remarks may be applied to all his preaching to the Jews, we will next examine his mode of addressing Gentiles, or Heathens. He had been preaching to the Jews in Athens,\* when his doctrines excited the attention and curiosity of some philosophers of that city. We notice a curious mistake of these idolaters. They heard Paul preaching to the Jews, and some of them supposed that he was proclaiming two new deities, "because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection."† To gratify their love of novelty, they conducted him to Mars' Hill, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is, whereof thou speakest ?" He then proceeds to give them a full development of Christian truth. Indeed no faithful minister of the gospel could have neglected an opportunity so favorable. We may remark that his reasoning differs considerably from that which he thought proper to address to the Jews. He could not prove to these Heathens, from the *Scriptures*, that Jesus was the Messiah whom God was to sanctify and send into the world ; for they knew

\* Acts xvii.

† v. 18, 19.

nothing of the Scriptures, nor of the one God whom they revealed. He was obliged to address them on principles of natural religion. He even quotes one of their own poets to support his argument, "for we are also his offspring." \*

Having proved the existence of one Eternal God, Creator, Ruler, Father of the Universe, he proceeds to make a moral use of this great truth. He proclaims the certain judgment of a future life, as confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He does not tell these idolaters that the Supreme Deity, whose existence he has been proving, assumed a human form, and came into the world to be its Redeemer, Sovereign, and Judge. No, his doctrine is as different as possible from this; he tells them that God overlooked the conduct of man when in darkness and ignorance,† "but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by *that man whom he hath ordained*, whereof he hath given assurance, inasmuch as *he hath raised* him from the dead."

This discourse on Mars' Hill must be considered as exhibiting Paul's views of the important doctrines of Christianity, because it was delivered to the Athenians at their express request for full information. And he could not fail of giving them this information without gross unfaithfulness to the cause, for which he was ever ready to encounter peril, suffering, and death. We shall see what he really taught on this occasion, and how per

\* Acts xvii. 28.

† v. 30, 31.

fectly it accords with Unitarian preaching. He enforced the following great practical truths. 1. That there is one only true God, Creator and Ruler of all things. 2d. That this God now calls all men everywhere to repentance (or reformation) because, 3d. There is a future life of retribution, and God has appointed a day of judgment for the world. 4th. He *has ordained a man*, and given him power and wisdom to judge in righteousness, or justice. And 5th. He has raised this agent from the dead, to prove, beyond a doubt, that he had a divine commission. These five propositions embody the whole substance of the apostle's sermon to the Athenians. The doctrine is pure Unitarianism. It is obviously impossible that his hearers could have inferred from this discourse that Jesus, whom God had ordained, and whom he had raised from the dead, was that God himself. The same remarks may be applied to every instance of his preaching as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The whole tenor of his discourse is to give glory to Jesus Christ as one whom "God had highly exalted," but not an intimation is given, that he believed him to be God himself.

The only apparent exception to this remark is found in Acts xx. 28. "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." There is a mistake in the common version. By recurring to Griesbach's Greek Testament, which is received as the best authority both by Trinitarians and Unitarians, it will be seen that the word, God, is not found in the original;—it should read, "to feed the church of the Lord," a common appellation of our Saviour as "head of the church."

It may perhaps be said, that as we have only a

part of Paul's preaching handed down to us, we are not authorized to infer with certainty that he was a Unitarian preacher. To this we may answer, we can judge of his sentiments only by what we have. What is lost can prove nothing. This is believed to be fair reasoning. We gather the opinions of Dwight or Buckminster from what remains of their discourses. Our Trinitarian brethren call every preacher a Unitarian, if he do not distinctly avow his belief in the supreme, underived divinity of Jesus Christ. They will not allow that any faithful minister could omit this doctrine in an exhibition of Christian truth. We reason in the same way in this case. We have shown several occasions in which the inspired apostle would have felt himself obliged to declare that Jesus was the living God, had he believed him to be so. We appeal to his own powerful and impassioned descriptions of our Saviour, when it was his object to exalt him in the estimation of his hearers. He professes to declare the whole counsel of God, to explain fully the character and office of Jesus; yet his highest praise is, that he is the Messiah, "whom God *hath appointed* to judge the world in righteousness — whom he *hath raised* from the dead — *made him* sit at his right hand, and *crowned him* with glory and honor." Now, how is this reserve to be accounted for? If he did not preach Christ's supreme divinity to the Jews, who had never thought of him as God, nor to Gentiles, who had never thought of him at all, to whom should he have preached it? To whom should it ever be preached, if so many different times and occasions could not call it forth from this bold and powerful champion of the cross?



It is to God, the Father of the Universe, and to him only, that the apostle ascribes supreme and underived divinity. It is the reflected lustre of this divinity that shines in the face of his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. The Father reigns on the throne of the universe, unrivalled, and alone, and from this eternal and fathomless fountain emanations of light, and wisdom, and power have descended, "without measure" upon this chosen representative; so that in him "dwells the fulness of the divinity."

II. Having shown that Paul was a Unitarian in his *preaching*, we have reason for supposing that he was so in his *writings*. To prove this it will be necessary to take a brief notice of each Epistle. It will not be denied that this is a work of some difficulty; for even Peter says there are things in his brother Paul's writings, hard to be understood. The plain, unequivocal proofs, however, that he was a Unitarian, are so very numerous, that the chief difficulty consists in making such a selection as can be reduced within proper limits.

In the second chapter of Romans, we find the following passage. "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ."\* The apostle here refers all judgment to God, *through* the agency of his Son. Compare this testimony, with that of our Saviour himself — "the Father judgeth no man but *hath committed* all judgment unto the Son."† If God has committed all judgment to the Son, it is obvious that the Son himself had not eternal and underived power of judging — therefore he is not the Omnipotent God — "God has

\* Rom. ii. 16.

† John v. 22.

*given him* authority to execute judgment also, *because he is the Son of man.*" \*

"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more ; death hath no more dominion over him ; for in that he died, he died unto sin once ; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." † The apostle here wishes to inspire confidence in the Saviour by showing that his life and divine commission are beyond the power of death ; "because he liveth unto God" — because his life is devoted to the purposes of God or is sustained by the power of God. He could not have used this argument, if he had believed Christ to be the ever-living, self-existent God ; for it plainly denies his self-existence. He would have said death hath no dominion over him, because he is Jehovah, who cannot die. Compare this with our Saviour's own assertion, "as the Father has life in himself, so he *hath given* to the Son to have life in himself." ‡ If this assertion does not mean that God only is self-existent, and Christ derived his being from God, I see not that any explanation of it can be given. But it is not from a few texts only that Paul is proved to have written to the Romans as a Unitarian ; evidence of the fact presents itself on every page of this Epistle. Such expressions as the following need no comment. "I thank my God *through* Jesus Christ." Rom. i. 8. "Christ Jesus, *whom God hath set forth.*" iii. 25. "We have peace with God *through* our Lord Jesus Christ." v. 1. "The grace of God \* \* \* which is *by* one man, Jesus Christ." v. 15 "Christ was raised up from the dead *by* the glory of the *Father.*" vi. 4. "Alive unto God *through* Jesus Christ

\* John v. 27.

† Rom. vi. 9, 10.

‡ John v. 26.

our Lord." vi. 11. "The gift of God is eternal life *through* Jesus Christ our Lord." vi. 23. "I thank God *through* Jesus Christ our Lord." vii. 25. God *sending* his own Son," etc. viii. 3. "*He* that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies." viii. 11. "We are . . . heirs of God, and *joint-heirs with Christ.*" viii. 17. "Christ that *died*, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at *the right hand of God.*" viii. 34. "That ye may . . . glorify God even the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ." xv. 6. "To God only wise be *glory through* Jesus Christ for ever." xvi. 27.

In the Epistles to the Corinthians, we find the following testimonies. "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of *God is made* unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." \* "And ye are Christ's and *Christ is God's.*" † "And *God* hath both *raised up the Lord*" [Jesus], "and will also raise us up at the last day by his own power." ‡ Is it possible that St. Paul could have made these assertions, if he had believed Christ to be the Omnipotent God? Here are three propositions, all false unless he is a dependent being. 1. God *made* him wisdom, etc. — therefore these are not inherent attributes. 2. Christ belongs to God, he is his subject, his property — therefore not himself supreme. 3. God raised him from the dead by his own power, in the same manner as he will raise us — therefore Jesus is dependent on God for life itself.

If further testimonies were needed, we might quote many such passages as the following. "*I thank my God* always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is

\* 1 Cor. i. 30.

† iii. 23.

‡ vi. 14.

given you *by* Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. i. 4. "The head of man is Christ, and the *head* of Christ is *God*." xi. 3. "We have testified of *God* that he *raised* up Christ." xv. 15. "Blessed be *God*, even the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. i. 3. "Thanks be unto *God*, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." ii. 14. "All things are of *God*, who hath reconciled us to himself *by* Jesus Christ." v. 18. "Though he was crucified through weakness, yet he *liveth by the power of God*." xiii. 4. Such is the apostle's usual manner of distinguishing between God and Jesus Christ. The following passage is important in this inquiry on two accounts. "And there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, (as there be gods many and lords many;) but *unto us* there is but one God, the Father, *of whom* are all things, and we in him, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *by whom* are all things, and we by him."\* This shows that the term God is applied to beings inferior to Jehovah. But this is not all. If language has any meaning, it proves that God is one being, and Jesus Christ another being distinct from him. It also asserts that we are to regard God as the ultimate source, *from whom* all things flow; and Jesus Christ as the agent or channel of his favor, *through whom* all things flow.

The next passage which I shall quote is absolutely decisive of this question. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all

\* Cor. viii. 4-6.



authority and power; for he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. . . . But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that He" [God] "is excepted, who *did put* all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself *be subject* unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."\* This can scarcely require a comment. Here are two plain, direct assertions, each sufficient to prove that Paul regarded our Saviour as a subordinate agent. 1. God put all things under him — that is, Jesus acted with delegated power. 2. The time is coming when he is to give up this delegated power. I am not aware of any argument which can render it credible, that the apostle should apply this language to Jehovah, "whose dominion endureth for ever." Let the Trinitarian seriously ask himself if he is not in a great error? If Jesus is the Almighty God, does he believe that he will ever give up his power and become a subject?

We come next to the Epistle to the Galatians. There is not a single word in it that favors the doctrine of Christ's supreme divinity. This is a remarkable fact, if the apostle was a Trinitarian. But more than this; there are several expressions in the Epistle which are utterly inconsistent with the belief that Jesus Christ is God. Of this character is the first verse, in which Christ is said to have been raised from the dead by "*God the Father.*" In the fourth verse he is represented as having given himself for our sins "according to the *will of God and our Father*, to whom be glory for ever." The seventh verse of the fourth chapter affirms of the Christian, that he is "*an heir of God through Christ.*" Thus our Saviour is

\* Cor. xv. 24-29.

uniformly spoken of as subordinate to God the Father. One other specimen from this Epistle will suffice. "But ye receive me as an angel of God—even as Jesus Christ."\* Angel is synonymous with messenger—and St. Paul indirectly assigns that character to Jesus Christ. He certainly does not mean to say, ye received me as you would receive God—but you received me as the authorized ambassador of God—as Jesus Christ, who came to reveal his will and accomplish his designs.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is still more explicit. We cannot doubt that it was written by a Unitarian.—"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, . . . according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He *raised him* from the dead, *and set him* at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and *hath put* all things under his feet; and *gave him* to be the head over all things to the church."† Let us look distinctly at the several propositions contained in this statement, and we shall find that Paul could not have regarded our Saviour as the supreme God. 1. The *God of our Lord* Jesus by his own power raised him from the dead. 2. *He set* him at his right hand, above all other created powers. 3. *He put* all things under him, *and made* him head over all things to the church. Thus he ascribes every thing to God, and nothing to Jesus as an independent being. Now either the apostle did not believe him to be Jehovah, or these three propositions are utterly false; they cannot be ex-

\* Gal. iv. 14.

† Eph. i. 17-22.

plained away on any correct principle of interpretation; they are not stated once and heedlessly, but deliberately and often. While there is not a single sentence in the whole epistle that contradicts them, they find more or less support in every chapter. For instance. "Blessed be the *God and Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ." Eph. i. 3. "*Through him*" [i. e. Christ] "we both have access by one spirit unto the *Father*." ii. 18. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ." iii. 14. "One Lord, . . . *one God and Father of all*, who is *above all*, and through all, and in you all." iv. 5, 6. "Giving thanks always for all things *unto God and the Father* in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." v. 20. Who may dare, in view of such declarations, to affirm that Paul did not write to the Ephesians as a Unitarian?

The Epistle to the Philippians bears the same testimony. Would a writer who believed Jesus Christ to be God express himself as Paul has done in the following passages? "The fruits of righteousness which are *by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise* of God." Phil. i. 11. "For we . . . *worship God* in the spirit and *rejoice in Jesus Christ*." iii. 3. "*My God* shall support all your need according to his riches in glory *by Christ Jesus*. Now unto *God and our Father* be glory for ever and ever, amen." iv. 17, 20. Such is the current language of this Epistle. It will not be pretended that there is more than one passage which even *seems* to have a contradictory import. We allude to the apostle's assertion that our Saviour "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." This has been considered a decisive proof of the Deity of Christ. We shall show that, taken according to the true

meaning of the original, and in connection with the context, it is so far from affording any support to this doctrine, that it is an unanswerable argument in favor of Unitarian views of the subject. The whole passage follows. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."\* This passage, we maintain, taken together, plainly disproves the Deity of Christ. This will appear if we particularly attend to the separate propositions. 1. "He was in the form of God." This means either that he was in the similitude of God — God-like, as being a divine messenger — or that he was the visible representative of God on earth; it is, in either case, equivalent to "the image of the invisible God," therefore a being distinct from God. 2. God *highly exalted* him and *gave* him a name above every name. If Jesus Christ were God himself, he would not be capable of *being exalted* — he would by his own nature be above all creatures. If he were the supreme Jehovah, would it be true that "*God had given* him a name above every name?" Was he not eternally and independently **above**



all other beings? Would St. Paul have thought it proper to refer his exaltation to God's favor? But what is more remarkable, 3. God is said to have exalted him as a reward for his obedience,\* "he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, etc." Jesus Christ, then, could be rewarded! as we are told in another place that "*for the joy* that was set before him, he endured the cross, etc."† 4. Consider also the *end* for which God is said to have exalted him, above all his creatures. Was it that they might give the glory to Jesus as God? No, the apostle says otherwise — "that at the name of Jesus, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." No evidence could be more positive than Paul regarded our Saviour, in his highest exaltation, as wholly dependent on God for his dignity and power. How, then, it will be asked, could Paul say of him, that he "thought it not robbery to be equal with God?" We answer that Paul did not say this. His words in the original Greek do not necessarily convey any such meaning. The passage is incorrectly translated. This last remark is admitted to be true by Trinitarians themselves. We have the original before us, and perceive that the word rendered in our common version, "equal, might at least as properly be translated *like*." It is often used to denote mere *resemblance*, both in the Scriptures and in the classics. And as to the phrase, he "thought it not robbery," we have the import of the original more exactly in the words, — he "thought it not a thing to be eagerly retained." Ac-

\* See Phil. v. 8 and 9.

† Heb. xii. 2.

cordingly, the passage may be correctly translated thus — “who being in the form of God, did not think this likeness to God a thing to be eagerly retained, but humbled himself,” etc. We now see the relevancy of the apostle’s argument, which was to enforce the duty of humility and benevolence by proposing the example of Christ. But to say that our Saviour “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” could serve only to encourage an opposite spirit. We perceive, also, a perfect agreement of this passage with the context, as well as with St. Paul’s other writings; whereas, according to the common version, it is at variance with them both. Besides, on the Trinitarian supposition that the apostle meant by these words to affirm that Christ is God, how can he be vindicated from the absurdity of saying of a being, *that he* thought it not robbery to be *equal with himself*? We are certain, therefore, from the whole passage, that St. Paul regarded our Saviour as an agent dependent on God for his power and glory.

The Epistle to the Colossians begins with Paul’s assertion that he is “an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God.*” In verse 12, of the first chapter, he gives “thanks unto the *Father*,” who “hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear *Son.*” Then follows a glowing description of the true Messiah. It is the apostle’s purpose to exalt him as an object of confidence and veneration. If, then, he had believed him to be God, he must have stated this conviction as the proper ground of reverence. He would not have represented, as he has done, the high claims of Jesus, as founded entirely on what God has done for him. Our Saviour is described in the fervent eloquence of St. Paul, as the agent of God’s

power, head of the church, first born from the dead, "*that in all things he might have the preëminence.*" Jesus, then, according to this representation, was not God; he did not *naturally* and of *himself* have the preëminence, but it was bestowed upon him, "because it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell." \*

Christ is said to have done, or created all things, by power delegated from God. It is evident, then, that he was not the supreme Creator; but there is some doubt what the apostle means by his having done or made all things. Some suppose that he existed in glory before the foundation of the world, and was the agent employed by God in the creation and support of all things in the material universe. Others offer good reasons for believing that the phrase "all things" should be limited to *all things* done by the gospel dispensation for the spiritual new creation or moral renovation of mankind. Examples are found of such limitation of general or universal propositions. The following is exactly to the purpose — St. John, addressing Christians, says to them, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know *all things.*" † The writer obviously means that they knew *all things* which Christians ought to know. So St. Paul says, "I can do *all things* through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Our present inquiry, however, does not call for the discussion of this question. Whatever opinion is adopted, it is still equally clear that St. Paul did not consider our Saviour as having underived power. For he speaks of "*God* who *raised* him from the dead." Col. ii. 12. He represents Christ, not as supreme, but as "sitting on the

\* Col. i. 12-20.

† 1 John ii. 20.

‡ Phil. iv. 13.

*right hand of God.*" iii. 1. He implies the inferiority of the Son to the Father in his injunction to Christians to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to *God the Father* by him." iii. 17. When he approaches nearest to attributing to Christ the perfections of Deity, he refers to the Father as the source of all. Let the reader compare the following texts, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" \* — "For it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell." † This is the doctrine of St. Paul; the blessed Saviour is not a common man, as some philosophers have asserted — he is the Son and Messenger of God, with divine wisdom and power, "for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the divinity." He is not the Supreme God, as some Christians believe, "for it *pleased the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell." ‡

This conclusion is placed beyond a doubt by the following — "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature" or of all creatures. § I have before explained the phrase, image of the invisible God, as necessarily signifying, a being distinct from God, the visible representative of his power and perfections on earth. "The first born of all creatures" — this obviously places him first among created beings, but still one of them, who derived his being from God. Whether this means first in time, or first in dignity, or both, does not at all concern the present inquiry. In either sense, the passage cannot be reconciled with the eternal, underived

\* Col. ii. 9.

† Col. i. 19.

‡ There is nothing in the original corresponding to the word *Father*, in this passage, yet the insertion of it by the translators is approved by the best Trinitarian commentators.

§ Col. i. 15.



divinity of him who is called a creature by the inspired apostle.

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians so fully authorize the same conclusion, that we need to notice only a single passage from each Epistle, to show that the apostle speaks of God and Jesus as beings distinct from each other, not only while Christ was on earth, but after his ascension. “Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the *living and true God*, and to wait for *his Son* from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even *Jesus* which delivered us from the wrath to come.” \* “We are bound to give thanks always to *God* for you . . . because *God* hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, . . . whereunto *He* called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the *glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” †

The Epistles to Timothy were charges to a minister whom St. Paul was peculiarly anxious to instruct as to “rightly dividing the word of truth.” Let us observe some specimens of what he deemed to be this word of truth. “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the *only wise God*, be honor and glory forever.” ‡ Was it to Jesus Christ that this ascription was made? Let the following passage afford an answer. “For there is *one God* and *one Mediator between God and man*, the man *Christ Jesus*.” § Again, “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things.” || Is not the Lord Jesus here represented as a distinct witness of conduct, as well as the angels? If, then, he is not a distinct *being* from God, what can this mean? Further, “*God*, who hath saved us, and

\* 1 Thess. i. 9, 10.

† 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

‡ 1 Tim. v. 21.

§ 1 Tim. ii. 5.

|| 1 Tim. v. 21.

called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to *his own purpose and grace*, which was given us in *Christ Jesus* before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ." \* Christ, therefore, not being the original source of our salvation, is inferior to God. Once more. "If we suffer with him" [i. e. Christ] "we shall also reign with him." † *Suffer with him — reign with him*; it would be impious for mere human beings to assert this of themselves in relation to one whom they regarded as the supreme God.

The Epistle to Titus was also a charge to a minister, whom the writer exhorted to adhere to "sound doctrine." ‡ Does Paul address him in the manner of a Trinitarian? Far from it. He is careful to distinguish between God and Christ as two beings. "Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God, *and* our Saviour Jesus Christ." § The title, great God, is never applied to Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, but frequently to the Father, and to him alone. Again, "God our Saviour, . . . according to *his own mercy*, saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit, which he shed on us abundantly *through* Jesus Christ our Saviour." || This is then the "sound doctrine" of St. Paul; — the "Great God" is our Saviour, as the eternal source of mercy and love, and Jesus Christ is our Saviour in a subordinate sense, as the organ or channel *through which* this mercy flows to man.

The Epistle to Philemon, about a slave, who had been converted to Christianity by the preaching of Paul at

\* 2 Tim. i. 8-10.

† Tit. ii. 13.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 12.

§ Tit. iii. 4-6.

¶ Tit. ii. 1.

Rome, contains nothing which relates to the subject of our present remarks.

We have now carefully examined the writings of Paul,\* and find that they correspond with his preaching; they uniformly represent our Saviour as the anointed Messenger of God, exalted by him to be a Prince and a Saviour, but never as God himself. It remains to consider what may be said against this conclusion. There are two passages which require explanation, as they *seem* to contradict the general tenor of the apostle's writings. We shall find, however, that there is no real inconsistency.

We meet with one difficulty in the Epistle to the Romans. "My kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever."† A very slight addition, authorized by the original Greek, removes this difficulty, and renders the passage consistent with the rest of the Epistle. It might read, "God be blessed for ever." St. Paul is here expressing his solicitude for his countrymen; and he relates God's providence and peculiar care over them, mentions the old and new covenants, and the promises made to the fathers. To this chosen nation, he says, belong the fathers from whom Christ descended, who is above all — over all — or better than all these other dispensations and persons, "*God be blessed for ever.*" This last clause accordingly is nothing more

\* See Note at the end.

† Rom. ix. 3, 4, 5.

than a natural expression of gratitude to God, for his best gift to man,—as he exclaims in another place, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” By adopting a different punctuation, however, which we are at liberty to do, since that of the common translation is of no authority, we may have, perhaps, a still more satisfactory interpretation of the passage. We may place a longer pause after the words, “Christ came;” then, by substituting, in the translation, *he who* for “who,” which the original admits of, and inserting a comma after God, we shall have the passage thus: “And of whom according to the flesh Christ came. He who is over all, God, be blessed for ever.” Or, by a freer version, the full meaning of the apostle, according to the opinion of some, may be given as follows: “Of whom was Christ according to the flesh; he who was over all, being God blessed for ever.” Whichever construction be preferred, the Trinitarian mode of explaining the passage must we think be deemed false, since, besides other objections to it, it is a fact that those early fathers of the church who entertained the highest notions of the Saviour’s character, and who, it must be supposed, understood the Greek language, never applied to Christ, even when most desirous to exalt him, the title of “God over all blessed for ever.”

The only other difficulty of this kind, is found in the following passage — “Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”\* Even as the present version stands, the difficulty is only apparent. The second clause is a figurative expression, equivalent to

\* 1 Tim. iii. 16.



“Immanuel,” God is with us. In this sense, we all believe that God was present, manifest to the world in his Son and ambassador Jesus Christ. It means no more than, that he is the “image of the invisible God,” “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person,” and is equivalent to other expressions which mean the visible representative of God upon earth.

But we ought not to be satisfied with the common version of this text, for it is founded on an erroneous reading in the original.\* The true reading is, “Great is the mystery of godliness; *he, who* was manifest in the flesh, was justified by the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.” This is perfectly intelligible; the word God is not found in the original manuscripts, but has been designedly or accidentally introduced into the text. It is a triumphant exclamation of the apostle — Great is the mystery of man’s regeneration from sin to holiness by the gospel; he who lived among us in human form, the representative of the divine character, and the messenger of the divine will, having accomplished the purposes of his mission, was received up by God into the bosom of his glory. We all believe, and we rejoice in believing this sublime truth; “for if Christ is not risen,” says Paul, “then our faith is vain, and your hope is vain.”

Our design is now accomplished. We have examined the thirteen Epistles of Paul, and have found them to bear positive evidence, that he regarded our Saviour as an agent who derived all his power and wisdom from God.

\* See Griesbach’s Greek Testament.

In eleven of these Epistles, and all his preaching, we do not find the least intimation that Jesus Christ is the self-existent Jehovah. And what can be opposed to this overpowering evidence? The whole opposite argument rests on one equivocal text in Romans, and another in Timothy, both of which, we have seen, can be easily explained, in harmony with the general tenor and spirit of his writings! If, then, we are ready to adopt the opinions of this eminent and inspired ambassador of Christ, whose writings and discourses occupy one third of the New Testament, we shall believe on our Saviour—not as a mere man, undertaking the reformation of the world with human genius and human power; we shall receive him as a divine teacher and master. We shall trust in him, as “God’s beloved Son in whom he is well pleased,” whom he has made the head of the church, “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last,” in the gospel dispensation, his best gift to save and bless our lost race.

We are told that Unitarianism would deprive us of our Saviour; but it is not so. “To us, there is one God, and one Lord Jesus Christ,” through whom living streams of light, and truth, and salvation have flowed, and shall for ever flow from the eternal and exhaustless fountain of mercy. The great apostle of the Gentiles, in his triumphant visions of inspiration, wanted no higher assurance than “that God had raised him from the dead.” He would not dim the glory of Jehovah’s throne by interposing another object of supreme homage. And shall not we be satisfied with such a Saviour on whom “God’s spirit descended without measure?” The moral perfections of Deity, reflected in him, are pledged to fulfil his promises. The hopes of the gospel are firm as the

throne of heaven; for God himself has laid their deep foundations, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone.

#### NOTE.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, has been omitted in this discussion, because there is not sufficient evidence that Paul was its author. Our limits will not allow an examination of its claims to be admitted among his writings. We may take, however, a brief notice of it, to show that its author, whoever he was, was certainly a Unitarian.

This Epistle is supposed to have been addressed to converts from Judaism to Christianity, to prevent their falling back into their old faith. So far as it is doctrinal, its design is to show that the religion of Christ is of higher authority and excellence than that of Moses. He proves the divine mission of Jesus Christ, and endeavors to exalt him as highly as possible in the estimation of his readers, by the three following considerations, each of which is illustrated and enforced with much learning and power.

1. That Jesus Christ was a divine messenger superior to the prophets of the old dispensation, or "angels," as they are called in the first chapter.

2. That he was superior to Moses, whom the Jewish converts regarded with great veneration.

3. That his priesthood was superior to the Levitical, inasmuch as the latter was ritual and temporary, while the former was spiritual and eternal.

It is evident that none but a Unitarian writer could have used these arguments, to prove the divine mission of our Saviour, and the divine origin of his religion

One who believed that he was the Supreme God, would have stated, and endeavored to enforce this conviction as the true ground of confidence in him. If *that doctrine* had been established, every argument to prove the eternal Jehovah superior to angels or prophets, to Moses and Aaron, could be considered little less than impious. I do not know the man who is hardy enough to make such an irreverent comparison with the formality of argument.

It is then nearly demonstrated in the outset, that this writer regarded our Saviour as a messenger of God, with delegated authority. We need not therefore dwell long on particular passages.

In the first chapter, it will not affect the argument, whether we understand "angels" as heavenly spirits or as messengers of God on earth. The connection, however, seems to me to require us to understand *messengers* — the same prophets spoken of in the first verse. There is another reason for supposing that the "prophets" and the "angels" meant the same persons. The writer proves Christ's superiority to these "angels," and afterwards his superiority to Moses. This would have been at least needless, if the "angels" had been supposed superior to Moses.

The meaning of the writer then is as follows, "God spoke in ancient times by the prophets, but in these last days by his Son — a more exalted messenger, because God *has made* him heir of all things; superior to these former messengers, since he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." That is, he is in a high and peculiar sense called his Son, while they are only servants.\*

\* Heb. i. 1-5.



Proceeding with the proofs of our Saviour's superiority, the writer says, "When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all these *messengers of God* (the angels, as it is in the common version), worship him," \* or do him homage as a superior. The word translated worship often has this signification, implying not the worship due to God, but the reverence which we may properly pay to a superior in dignity or age. For instance, "And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and *worshipped* the Lord and the *king*." †

The writer next illustrates our Saviour's superiority to the former messengers of God in this striking manner—he represents the Almighty as saying to him, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom; thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; *therefore* God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." ‡

The use of the term God in an inferior sense is not uncommon in the Old Testament, from which this passage is quoted; and one instance has been before noticed in which it is so used in the New. It is employed to designate heathen deities, angels, princes, magistrates, and rulers.§ Its primitive signification is power. It is employed first to denote the eternal Source of all power, and secondly, one who exercises delegated powers. Moses was to be a god to Aaron, because he was to be the organ of God's will to him. There is an instance in which wicked magistrates are called gods; "I have said,

\* Heb. i. 6.

† 1 Chron. xxix. 20.

‡ Heb. i. 9.

§ Ex. xx. 23; xxii. 28, etc.

ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High ; but ye shall die like men," etc.\*

In this qualified sense, the *name God* is employed in the following passage from the forty-fifth Psalm, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." This exalted praise is part of a coronation hymn, supposed to be addressed to Solomon. An earthly king is here called God, and his throne is said to be for ever and ever — an Oriental figure employed to express the permanence of his power. It may be well translated, "Thy throne, O king, stands firm and secure." Now this passage in the original Psalm has no reference to Christ, and its being quoted afterwards in this manner, evidently could not give it any such reference ; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews merely accommodated what was first addressed to a Jewish prince to the praise of our Saviour, a prince greater than all earthly princes. It is obvious, then, that the term God is here used in an inferior sense — because, as it was first applied to a temporal king, it would prove him to be the Almighty, as well as it could afterwards prove our Saviour to be so. But what follows is still more conclusive on this point — "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity ; *therefore God*, even *thy God*, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above *thy fellows*." If Jesus had been the Supreme God, could he have had fellows, or equals ? or could his righteousness be a subject of reward ? This famous passage, then, which has been thought to support the deity of Jesus Christ, will, if fairly examined, and understood, be found to disprove the doctrine completely !

\* Ps. lxxxii. 6, 7.

Again, the passage, which we have been considering represents our Saviour either as a subordinate agent, or as the Supreme Deity. If it does represent him as subordinate, the writer was certainly a Unitarian; if it represents him as Jehovah, it would be inconsistent in him to proceed next to prove that he was superior to Moses. Who ever thought that Moses was equal to God? What man in his senses could think it necessary to prove that God was superior to his servant?

Again, if the writer had understood that Jesus was God, it is evident he would not have employed so much learning and argument to prove that his priesthood was superior to that of Aaron and the Levites. If then we still maintain that this author believed in his supreme divinity, we must think him the most absurd and inconsequent of all reasoners — a conclusion which we shall by no means allow.

Numerous texts may be quoted in support of the inferences drawn in this note, but they cannot be necessary. Such evidence as we have already presented will not be resisted by any mind open to conviction. One more passage however will be noticed, because it has been misunderstood. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."\* This must be taken in connection with the main arguments of the Epistle, and its purpose, namely, to prevent the Jewish Christians from wavering in their faith. "The priesthood of our Saviour is unchangeable — be ye therefore firm and constant in your adherence to his religion." Or, "Jesus Christ does not change," "he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, *therefore* be not carried about by divers and strange doctrines."

\* Heb. xiii. 9.



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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

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WHAT DO  
UNITARIANS BELIEVE ?

BY

REV. SAMUEL J. MAY.

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## WHAT DO UNITARIANS BELIEVE?

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[The following is reprinted, at the request of many of our brethrer from a tract which has been much circulated. Of course, it is only an individual statement, and is not intended as a creed.]

BECAUSE we have no formula of faith; no system of doctrines; no list of articles prescribed by pope, bishops, General Assembly, or other human authority, which every one must profess to believe before he can be admitted to membership in our church, — there are those who allege that we Unitarians have no faith; that we believe nothing, or that each one believes what he pleases.

Other churches, it is urged, deal better by their members, — instructing them as to what they must believe, nay, furnishing to all who wish them printed copies of the system of doctrines which those churches severally uphold and contend for as the “faith once delivered to the saints,” which every one must accept in order to salvation. Nay, you may go to the book-stores, and buy the volumes in which are printed the creeds of the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist sects, — creeds devised and written out (some of them centuries ago) by men accounted wise enough to determine what others, as well as themselves, ought to believe, and thereby secure to the churches, for whose edification they were especially concerned, a unity of faith.

But, if any one supposes that this end has been attained in either of the above-named churches, he is much mistaken. Of course, what the creed is, that either church prescribes, may be found, as I have said, in this or that printed volume. But

what Episcopalians or Presbyterians or Methodists or Baptists individually believe, you can ascertain only by inquiring of them individually. And you will discover, — if you can get the members of either of these churches to define to you their real beliefs, — you will discover as many and great discrepancies between them as between the members of the Unitarian Church. It was publicly declared, not long ago, by an Orthodox minister of Syracuse, in the presence of hundreds who belonged to the Orthodox churches here, including several of their ministers, — it was publicly declared, that “no Trinitarian can be found, who, if called upon to state his views, would state them precisely in the language of the creeds of either the Presbyterian or the Episcopal churches.” This declaration was publicly made in the city of Syracuse, in the presence of hundreds; and never yet, so far as I know, has it been denied. It is notorious, that certain doctrines, explicitly stated in the above-named systems of faith, are not now preached in those churches. And I have several times made the assertion, which I here repeat, that nothing would so soon empty the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and other Orthodox churches, as for the ministers to read *intelligently* to the people the several creeds, or articles of faith, of those churches, and insist upon their believing each and every article thereof, in its most obvious sense, as the condition of continued membership.

I am utterly unable to discover the benefit which ever has been or can be derived from a creed prescribed by human authority; a formula of faith; a system of doctrines devised and concocted by any man or any set of men, to be enforced upon the assent of other men, each of whom has an inalienable right to think for himself. Were there time now, and were this the occasion, I would show that many and very grave evils, gross hypocrisies and atrocious cruelties, have everywhere, and in all ages, been the legitimate offspring of this assumption of authority to dictate to fellow-men what they must believe.

But my purpose, at this time, is to inform those who wish to know, what is the faith of Unitarians. Of course, I may not speak for all who bear this name, but for those only whose opinions and belief I do know; and they are many.



*First.* We believe and insist, that each and every rational and moral being, male and female, is under the highest obligation to form his or her own opinions about religion. Every one, we hold, is bound and therefore should be left perfectly free to seek after, if haply he may find, the truth of God for himself; form his own creed, his own body of divinity; be fully persuaded in his own mind as to what is true on every question that may arise respecting the character of God, the principles of the divine government, man's accountability, the design of his life in this world, and his destiny in the world to come. There is no other subject of thought comparable to this in importance; therefore every one should be encouraged and urged to give all the attention to it he may be able to give. By the study of the Bible, and the works and the providence of God, each one should strive to learn all he may of the mind, the purposes, the will of the heavenly Father, that he may become an intelligent and obedient child. He should avail himself of the thoughts, the results, of the inquiries and reasonings of others, so far as he shall find them profitable. But he is under no obligation whatever to accept the conclusions at which the mightiest intellects have arrived, if they do not appear to his own mind and heart accordant with the truth and righteousness of God. He who, in deference to the authority of another, professes to believe what he does not see to be true, has hoodwinked himself; or he has entered a labyrinth in which he will not know whether he is going right or wrong. But he who reverently embraces whatever, in the best use of his understanding, seems to him true and right, shows his allegiance to God; and he will not be left to wander into the path of fatal error.

We Unitarians believe with the Apostle Paul (Rom. viii. 14), that, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." We believe that Jesus of Nazareth was led by the Spirit of God more constantly and entirely than any other son of man; that he is therefore called the dearly beloved Son of God, and is the best teacher of true religion. We believe that the doctrines he preached disclosed more fully than those of any other teacher the character of God and his purposes

respecting man; and that the moral precepts he gave were more nearly identical with perfect righteousness, "the righteousness of God." Indeed, we believe that they only who hear and obey the commandments of Christ will be redeemed from all iniquity; and that the world will never be filled with righteousness, peace, and joy, until the children of men shall be trained up in the school of Christ, rather than that of Augustine or Calvin, — be taught to understand, and persuaded to conform to, the principles and spirit of "the dearly beloved Son of God."

All Unitarians believe that Jesus was one with God, — *in a spiritual sense*; the sense in which he prayed (John xvii. 21-23) that all who shall be brought to believe on him might become one with him and the Father. We believe he was wholly devoted to God, was led always by his Holy Spirit, and had no desire but to do his will. We all believe that Jesus was not a self-existent, but a created being, dependent upon and accountable to the one Supreme, whom he often addressed as his Father and his God.

Many Unitarians are Arians, that is, they believe that Jesus pre-existed; that he was an archangel, next in dignity to the Most High; that he appeared upon earth in the person of the son of Mary, and led the life and died the death that is narrated in the New Testament. Other Unitarians, probably the larger part of them, believe that he was a man supernaturally born of his mother only, in accordance with the accounts given by Matthew and Luke. But there are many of our denomination who believe, as I do, that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary; that the accounts prefixed to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, inconsistent with each other, are not genuine, but were taken from the thousand marvellous stories which were invented in the second and third centuries of the Christian era to magnify, in the eyes of the ignorant and credulous, the founder of the new religion, and do away the reproach of his crucifixion.

But, whatever may be our differences of belief on this point, we Unitarians all agree, that it is not the physical or metaphysical nature of Christ which most concerns us, but his

moral and religious character. We believe that he was the most excellent person who has ever lived upon earth; that he was a *perfect* man, holy, harmless, undefiled. We believe, that, in the highest degree, he was the Son of God, dearly beloved, because he was at all times, in all things, led by the spirit of the heavenly Father. We believe that he was tempted in all points like any other man, but that he never yielded to temptation. He did no sin. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; but he was perfected by his sufferings, and not made by them, as too many are, peevish, discontented, rebellious.

We Unitarians believe that Jesus is our great exemplar, set before us by the heavenly Father to be our pattern in all things; that in him we see "the measure of the stature of the perfect man," "the mark of our high calling;" that, "as he was holy, so are we called to be holy in all manner of conversation." It is therefore a prominent article of the Unitarian faith, that all men ought to act at all times as Jesus would act in the same circumstances. The best test we can apply to our own conduct, words, feelings, and to the conduct, words, feelings of others is this: Would "the perfect man" act, speak, feel thus? And in estimating the character of men, and the regard in which they ought to be held in the Christian Church, we Unitarians believe that we should consider, not the accuracy of their speculative opinions, "the form of sound words" to which they may give their assent, but the degree of goodness which is seen in their daily lives, the principles on which they act, and the feelings which they manifest in their intercourse with their fellow-men; moreover, the spirit which they evince towards God under the various trying circumstances of life, prosperity and adversity, joy and sorrow, health and sickness. In short, we Unitarians believe that "he only who doeth righteousness is righteous;" that he only whose character resembles Christ's is a Christian; that he only loves God who loves his fellow-men, who loves to be and to do good.

Unitarians, most if not all of us, repudiate the Orthodox doctrine of Atonement, as it is explained by many, — that men are saved by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, or in



some way transferred to their account in the final reckoning with the Judge of all. Much more earnestly and utterly do we reject it as others teach it, — that God inflicted upon him, and that Jesus endured, the *punishment* due to all sinners for their native, original depravity, and for their actual transgressions; and that, in consideration of his vicarious *punishment*, those are saved who believe in and gratefully accept this propitiation. Most Unitarians, if not all, consider this dogma as most odious, an impious stigma upon the character of our heavenly Father. Of course, we most gratefully acknowledge that Christ suffered much for the redemption of sinners; that he gave his life on the ignominious and excruciating cross, that he might fix in the hearts of men those truths, those principles, that faith, that hope, that love, which alone could raise them above the trials and temptations of earth. But we believe that men are saved only so far as they themselves accept the truths and embrace the principles which Jesus so impressively inculcated, and acquire the spirit which the beloved Son of God manifested through life, and especially on the day and in the hour of his death. We believe that men are saved, and can be saved, only so far as they become themselves righteous in the sense and spirit of Christ's righteousness.

We repudiate utterly the Orthodox doctrine, that only a small portion of the human race are elected to be saved; that these favored few were predestinated unto everlasting life before the foundation of the world; and that all the rest of mankind were fore-ordained to everlasting death, which means everlasting life in unalterable and profitless suffering. We turn from such a proposition as from the blasphemy of demoniacs. We believe that the gift of life was intended by the heavenly Father to be a blessing to every one upon whom he has conferred it; that it may be a blessing to every one, in this present state, who chooses so to make it; and that, in the future state, those who have been perverted, misguided, depraved by the evil influences of this world, may be brought to a sense of their folly and wickedness by the retributive consequences, — the shame and suffering they will endure in the future life, — and *there* may repent, turn to God, and be accepted by him.



We Unitarians believe that the consequences of transgressions are evil, only evil, and that continually, both in this world and in the world to come. Sin is the poison of life, and it is "the sting of death." Sin is the only thing to be dreaded in time and in eternity. It is the abundant source of all our misery. It obscures the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and covers the benignant face of the heavenly Father with a dense cloud which men call "the wrath of God," although we are assured he is unchangeable, ever the same tender, compassionate parent, "slow to anger," "ready to forgive," but too just, too holy, too pure to overlook any iniquity. Benignant as God is, no sinner can ever stand before him but in shame and confusion of face; and he must cease to be a sinner before he can be happy in his presence, that is, anywhere.

We believe that our all-wise, all-merciful Father in heaven can feel no more displeasure, no more anger at our sins, than the wisest and kindest parent ought to feel. He cannot be stimulated to vengeance, as the Orthodox would have us suppose, by any pride of place, or jealousy of his power. He will inflict no more suffering, no more punishment, upon any, than it is right we should endure, until we repent, and return to him in entire obedience of life and thought. Indeed, many Unitarians hardly dare to pray that any of the *consequences* of our iniquities may be averted from us, excepting upon our true repentance, because we believe that there is no more wise, no more merciful provision in the Divine Government, than that which has attached shame, suffering, punishment, to iniquity, transgression of any of God's laws, sin of every kind. It is by these consequences, by the bitter experience of some of them in this life, and the fearful looking-for of others in the life to come, that we are taught the essential, the irreconcilable, the eternal difference between right and wrong, good and evil, sin and holiness.

We Unitarians believe that there is nothing in this life or the life to come to hinder the salvation of any one, nothing in the peculiarities of the Divine Nature or the organization of the Divine Government, nothing to prevent the acceptance of any child of Adam, excepting *his own sins*; and that,

whenever these are repented of and forsaken, no earthly father ever received a returning prodigal more graciously than the heavenly Father will receive and bless the penitent sinner.

Of course, consistently with what I have declared to be our faith, we Unitarians do not believe as do our Orthodox brethren respecting the nature of man; or rather, I should say, we cannot believe what the creeds of the Presbyterian and other Orthodox sects set forth on this subject. We cannot believe, that, in consequence of their transgression, our first parents "became dead in sin," as the Presbyterian Confession of Faith declares, "and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body." Nor do we believe that "the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature was conveyed to all their posterity," whereby we all are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." We reject this as a horrible misrepresentation of God, and of the nature and condition of men.

But we do believe that the transgression of Adam and Eve, and the sins of all parents since their day, have transmitted to their offspring germs which, if not repressed, will develop into kindred sins. We believe that all the children of men are born capable of holiness and liable to sin; with senses, appetites, faculties, affections, passions, which adapt them to live in a world like this, to enjoy, innocently if they will, all the good and pleasant things which here abound, and to discharge all the duties and exercise all the virtues that here may be required of them: but, at the present time, these properties of their nature are avenues to temptations, which, if not resisted, will mislead and corrupt their souls.

We do not deny, but sorrowfully own, that a great proportion of the children of men, in all ages, have yielded more or less to their temptations; and, therefore, that sins and their sad consequences ever have and still do abound in the world. The lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, the love of money, the eager desire for power, envy, jealousy, revenge, have overspread the earth with crimes and miseries.

This sad state of things, we believe, is owing, in a great

measure, to the incompetency, or the negligence, or the evil examples of parents, or to their mistaken views of human nature and of education. We hold that the highest office which can be conferred upon human beings is the office of parents. Upon the faithful and wise fulfilment of its duties depends the welfare of mankind, more than upon that of governors, presidents, or kings, or upon that of ministers, priests, or bishops. If all fathers and mothers were what fathers and mothers ought to be, the children of men would be also children of God; communities would be like well-ordered, happy families; the only law would be the Golden Rule; and the will of God would be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

We Unitarians believe that the ignorance, sin, and misery which abound in the world are, in another great measure, owing to the influence of false religions. Pure and undefiled religion—doing justly, loving mercy, walking humbly, keeping one's self unspotted from the world—is so noiseless and unostentatious, as well as difficult, that men have ever been found too ready to believe, and priests and religious visionaries have encouraged them to believe, that something else might be substituted for the daily and hourly practice of all righteousness. Outward observances, imposing rites and ceremonies, costly sacrifices and oblations, the keeping of holy days, paying tithes, performing pilgrimages, building churches, contributing generously to the support of the priesthood or for the maintenance of those who will compass sea and land to make proselytes,—these things, and such as these, have, in all ages, in every country, and under every religious system, been substituted for personal obedience to the laws of right action, fidelity to God and to man, in all things, at all times.

Notwithstanding the exceedingly plain and emphatic declarations of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and other Hebrew prophets; notwithstanding the explicit, impressive preaching of Jesus Christ, his Sermon on the Mount, his inimitable parables, his prophetic description of the final judgment, and, more than all, his own perfect example,—the people throughout Christendom have been misled by their priests and theologians into notions respecting the way to avert the displeasure and con-



ciliate the favor of the Most High scarcely less false than those which prevail in the Mahometan and Pagan lands.

The vast majority of the people called Christian have been so perverted from the religion of the gospel, that they suppose their salvation and acceptance with God depends very much more upon their faith in the righteousness of Christ, than upon their own personal righteousness;\* very much more upon their assent to the creed which some church prescribes to them, than upon their obedience to the commandments which God hath given them; very much more upon their having been the subjects of a revival, and having had a remarkable experience, than upon having always humbly and prayerfully endeavored to know and to do what the Lord requires; very much more upon their strict observance of the sabbath, their frequent attendance upon religious meetings, their fervency in prayer, and their zeal in defence of this or that form of sound doctrine, than upon their living truly and beautifully in all the relations of life, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in the world.”

Now we Unitarians believe that each and all of these substitutes for true religion — the putting of Roman Catholicism or Calvinism or Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism or Baptism or Methodism in the stead of Christianity — has been, is, and ever must be, disastrous in its influence upon the characters, the spiritual welfare, and improvement of men.

We believe that only those teachers of religion who insist that personal holiness of life and heart *is the one thing needful*, — only such are teachers of the school of Christ; and that never, until people generally are brought unfeignedly to be-

\* The most popular and able Orthodox preacher in our country has just now so declared, in “A Familiar Lecture,” delivered to his large audience, and published in an extensively circulated journal, “The Independent,” Feb. 9, 1860.

“This is our danger: not that we shall be sinful, not that we shall be imperfect, not that we shall be vain, not that we shall be foolish, not that we shall be corrupt in our imaginations, but that we shall not believe in Christ. *Our salvation is not half so much imperilled by wickedness as by unbelief.*”



lieve that this personal obedience to God in all things is indeed the one thing needful,— never will that obedience be generally sought after, and the education of children be so devised and conducted, from the beginning, as to develop the divine in them, and lead them to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

Never, until the health and life of each man's soul is shown and believed to depend upon his conformity of himself to his highest ideas of right, will the thought of right assume and maintain that prominence in his regard which it ought ever to have.

We believe in the cross; upon it we behold the glory of our Lord, his spirit of entire self-sacrifice. Some of us have put up, in and upon our churches, representations of the cross, as the emblem, not of that righteousness which is to be imputed to us, but of that righteousness which each one of us should endeavor to attain to; a righteousness so true, so entire, that it would prompt and strengthen us to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye,—nay, even to give up life itself, rather than violate a principle of godliness; yes, sacrifice our bodies, and all that we hold dear in life, rather than deny the faith, sully the purity, or darken the hope of our souls.

We Unitarians believe in prayer. True prayer is the breathing of the soul. Without it there is no spiritual life. It is the constant aspiration of the “inner man” to be continually renewed in knowledge and holiness, “after the image of Him that created him.” But we reject much that is called prayer. Nothing is prayer but the sincere desire of the heart, “uttered or unexpressed.” Exercises of domestic, social, and public prayer are doubtless very useful, when conducted in a right spirit. But the prayer-meeting or the church-assembly is not the place to which we go to satisfy ourselves whether any men are truly religious. The mere decorum of the occasion would keep most persons there “seeming to be religious.” We would go rather to the places of men's business and pleasure. We would observe them in their intercourse with their fellow men and women. We would know on what principles they act in trade, in politics, in places of amusement; how

they deport themselves toward their superiors and their inferiors, those they are dependent on, and those who are dependent on them. We would see them in their hours of recreation, when unwithheld, and consider how far their love of pleasure carries them. Still more must we be informed of their conduct in their domestic relations, whether they fulfil well the paramount duties there, — the conjugal, parental, filial and fraternal.

We believe that it is not what a man may profess or pretend to be that should establish his claim to the Christian name, but what he is seen and known to be in all those relations and intercourses which try and prove “what spirit he is of.”

These are some of the things that Unitarians believe. We do not, however, set them forth as *a creed*; we have not arranged them into a system of faith which every one must accept and assent to in order to his salvation. We dare not prescribe any form of words, which our fellow-men must subscribe to, or else be damned. Some dear children of God may believe more, some may believe less, than we do. “Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

Without, therefore, dictating to others precisely any set of articles as essential to be believed, we only insist that they must believe that or those things which shall incite, guide, and strengthen them “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us *from all iniquity*, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

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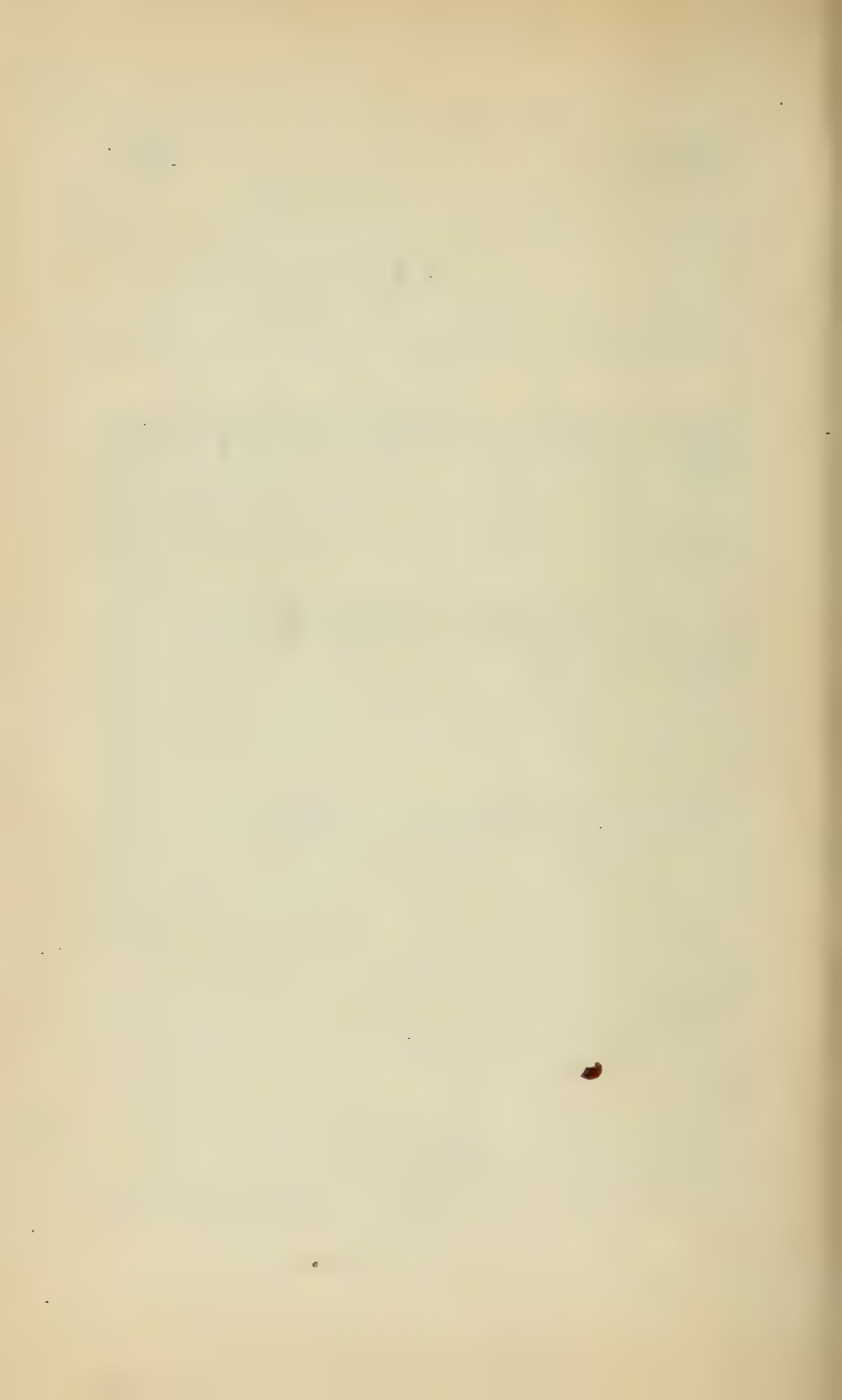
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THE  
APOSTLE PETER  
A UNITARIAN.

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THE

## APOSTLE PETER A UNITARIAN.

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BEFORE Peter became acquainted with our Saviour, he was a Jew. As such he had been born and educated. He must therefore have been a believer in the doctrine of the Divine Unity. He must have been a worshipper of One God in one person. This will be conceded by all who are conversant with the Jewish history, and whose opinion deserves respect. That Peter could have been a Trinitarian before his conversion to Christianity, is as improbable as that he could have been an atheist. If he ever afterward departed from this fundamental principle of the religion in which he had been brought up, we may reasonably expect to find some notices of so remarkable a change, in the copious accounts we have of his subsequent life. These accounts are contained in the Scriptures of the New Testament. We learn from them that, almost from the very commencement of our Lord's public ministry, to his ascension into heaven, Peter was his most talented and zealous disciple, and that subsequently, for the space of more than thirty years, he was one of the ablest and most successful advocates of the Christian cause.

The question now presents itself — Have we any evidence that Peter, either while a pupil in the school of Christ, or at any time afterward in the course of his ministry, abandoned his old belief in the doctrine of the divine unity, and embraced Trinitarianism? Have we not, on the contrary, the most satisfactory proof that he was, both as a disciple, and a teacher, a Unitarian?

If it be assumed that he ever did abandon his old belief, in the respect we have mentioned, we ask, When? Nor are we unreasonable in our demand. Certainly, an event so extraordinary, at least to his own mind, could not have been passed over in silence, nor even with a slight notice. If others saw fit not to record it, *he* assuredly would not have omitted to mention it. He must have dwelt upon it often and feelingly. He must have told us at what time, and under what circumstances, a change so fundamental, so opposed to his most deeply rooted prejudices, and so widely affecting the great system of religion, took place; as he has done, with such minuteness of detail, concerning the far less important subject of admitting the Gentiles to Christian privileges upon equal footing with the Jews. Now, we repeat the question, when did any such change, as we have described, take place? We say, never. And we rest this assertion, in the first instance, on the silence of the Scriptures. We challenge any one to lay his finger on a single sentence, either from Peter himself, or from any other inspired man, which in its proper connection affords the least particle of evidence, of his ever having embraced Trinitarianism after he had abandoned Judaism. We rest our assertion, in the second place, and chiefly, upon the positive proofs of his Unitarianism, derived from



his known declarations and conduct while a pupil of Christ; from the recorded instructions which he, in common with the other disciples, received during that period: from his public discourses, controversies, devotions, and private teachings, as given us by the sacred historian who reported the Acts of the Apostles; and from his own writings that have come down to us.

1. We begin with his *declarations* and *conduct* while a pupil of Christ. Peter was, of all the disciples, the most likely, from his natural ardor and habitual forwardness, to object to whatever our Saviour might propose adapted to shock his prejudices. And so it was in fact. It was he who rebuked his master, when he first announced his future sufferings. But we need not cite particular instances. Our readers must be prepared, by what they recollect of Peter's character, for the question, whether it is credible, that one so prompt on all occasions to speak from the first impulse of feeling, could have heard Jesus, at any time, assert the existence of "three persons in the Godhead, equal in substance, power, and glory," and not have expressed his surprise at what must have appeared to him, educated as he had been, so nearly approaching to polytheism? Especially, could he have refrained from expressions of astonishment, if, on any occasion, our Saviour in the character of the predicted Messiah — a character which no Jew ever dreamed would be properly Divine — had claimed to be Jehovah in the flesh, and the object of supreme religious adoration? Impossible! And the fact that no expressions of the kind we have been supposing, ever to our knowledge fell from the lips of this disciple, is one proof that Jesus never

inculcated the principles of Trinitarianism upon his followers. But much more than this. There are positive declarations of Peter on record, respecting our Lord's character, that can leave no doubt as to his opinions: declarations, which, connected as they are with the approving words of his master, afford the most convincing testimony that Christ did not claim to be, nor was considered by Peter, the supreme God.

We recur, for an example, to the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. To the question of Jesus to his disciples, — "Whom say ye that I am?" — Peter, with his characteristic promptness replied. In what terms? Precisely in such as any Unitarian would have used — "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And what said our Saviour to this? Did he intimate that he had received an imperfect answer? Did he insinuate that Peter, not having had access to the true source of light, was still in the dark as to his real character in this most important particular? Not at all; but bestowed on him the highest commendations, reminding him, at the same time, that such intelligence could have come only from God: — "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jona; for flesh and blood have not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." And yet another time also, Peter made the same explicit and unhesitating confession. It was when Jesus said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the *Son* of the living God." Such is a specimen of Peter's declarations concerning the dignity of our Saviour's character. They were made on occasions,

when, if ever, he would have acknowledged his master's highest claims, and when Jesus, it must be supposed, would have corrected him, had he expressed inadequate views. Yet Peter, so far from calling him God, only professed his belief in him as the Christ, the Son of God, or, which is the same thing, the Messiah; and our Lord, instead of appearing dissatisfied with the profession, in one instance applauded it.

Nor is this all. Peter's known *conduct*, while conversant with his master, accorded with his declarations. He never betrayed the emotions, nor exhibited the manners, nor performed the acts of one, who believed himself in the immediate bodily presence of his Maker and his God. This is a strong point of the argument. Bring the subject home to your own bosoms, and imagine how a mortal man would feel and behave himself in such a presence; and having done this, carry your thoughts back to the time of Christ's ministry on earth, and observe how familiarly Peter lived with him; how he ate, and drank, and conversed with him; how he accompanied him whithersoever he went, now rebuking, and now commending him; at one time uttering the most solemn asseverations of attachment, and at another denying that he ever knew the man, — and then lay your hand upon your heart, and say, if you can, that Peter regarded Jesus as Jehovah.

2. And why should it be supposed by any that Peter ought to have so regarded his master? Whence could he derive the doctrine of the trinity? How was he to learn that the Messiah was God? It is conceded that he did not bring these notions with him from the synagogue; and we shall now show that he could not find

them in the school of Christ. The *instructions* that he received, in common with the other disciples, were invariably and strictly Unitarian. An example to the contrary is not upon record. We do not assert this unadvisedly. We have read the Gospels through with particular regard to this point; and we know that, in no instance did Jesus affirm that the Deity exists in three equal persons, or that he himself is God. On the contrary, we know that he repeatedly, and in the most unequivocal language, bore his testimony to the proper unity of the divine nature, and to his own inferiority to, and dependence upon the Father Almighty. Of what essential attribute of Deity did he not expressly and more than once disclaim the possession? Of underived and independent existence? He said, "I live *by* the Father; as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he *given* to the Son to have life in himself." Of almighty and underived power? These are his words, "I can of mine own self do nothing; all power is *given* unto me." Of omniscience? His language is this, "As my Father hath *taught* me, I speak; of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels, neither the *Son*, but the Father only." Was such teaching as this very well suited to make such a pupil as Peter a Trinitarian? You remember our Saviour's answer to one who applied to him the appellation "good" in too high a sense; — "Why callest thou *me* good; there is none good but *one*, that is, God." Did Peter, constant as he had been in his attendance upon his master, know nothing of this? You remember, too, our Lord's reply to the Jews, who falsely accused him of making himself equal with God; "The Son can do *nothing* of himself, but what he seeth the Father do."



But why multiply texts? Who does not know that the teachings of Jesus abound in such passages? And where are any of a contrary import to be found? Read over his sermon on the mount, to which the disciples listened. Not a word of Trinitarianism appears there. Read his parables; nothing of such a doctrine appears in them. Listen to his devotions; all are addressed to the one God, the Father of all. Look at the directions he gave to his disciples as to the object of *their* devotions. Does he tell them to pay religious homage to him? O no; how different from this are his injunctions, even without a single exception. "When ye pray, say, Our Father." "In that day ye shall ask me nothing." "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it to you." Witness his miracles. These, we are told, prove his supreme deity. Why then did he, before he bid Lazarus come forth from the grave, address this prayer to God, — "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me?" And why did he so often, as if purposely to multiply guards against that error of subsequent times which we are opposing, refer all his powers to the Father as the author of them?

Listen now to the language of his common discourses with his disciples. Does he not continually speak of himself as *sent* by the Father; as *coming* from the Father; as *anointed* of God; as *depending* upon God; as being *one with his disciples* as he was one with the Father? And can you believe still that Peter was taught to regard him as the supreme God? Without the least qualification, he said — "My Father is greater than I." Could Peter ever after believe and assert that God the Father was not greater than his master? Turn your

thoughts to the Saviour in the garden. Peter was one of his chosen companions. He, if any one, witnessed his agony, and heard his prayer; "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." What words could this disciple have listened to more expressive of his master's consciousness that he was inferior to and dependent upon the Most High? Look again, and see him an unresisting prisoner, and now a bleeding victim on the cross. Hear his memorable words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Behold him bow his head and give up his breath. See him entombed. Are these demonstrations to the mind of Peter of his master's deity? Is it said that Peter was not a witness of these scenes? Be it so. We will look further. After the resurrection Jesus taught Unitarianism. "Go to my brethren," said he to Mary, "and say unto them, I ascend to *my* Father and *your* Father, to *my* God and *your* God." Ponder these words. Has God brethren? Has the eternal and self-existent a Father and a God, such as men have? Among the last words he addressed to Peter and the other disciples are these; "Behold I will send you the promise of my Father." "As the Father hath sent *me*, even so send I you." "All power is *given* unto me." But why prolong the discussion? Such, as we have seen, was the course of education through which Peter passed, under the immediate direction of Jesus Christ. It was not varied, in respect to the doctrines in dispute, that we know of, up to the moment of our Saviour's ascension into heaven. How, then, stands the case? From all we can learn of Peter's

declarations, conduct, and education, while a pupil of Christ, we are compelled to believe that he was a Unitarian at the period of his history, at which we have now arrived.

But new revelations are to be made to him, it may be said. Our Saviour, just before his death, promised to the disciples further illumination, by which they would be led "into all truth." Who knows, it may be asked, but Peter, Unitarian as he doubtless was at that time, may yet see cause to change his opinions and become a teacher of Trinitarianism? In reply to this, we will not stop to show the intrinsic improbability of such an event; but proceed to ascertain how the matter stands in point of fact. The question is to be settled by recurring to the records we have of his preaching, controversies, private teaching, devotions, and writings. That we may not be accused of taking a partial view of the evidence in the case, we shall adduce all of it that relates to the subject.

3. What then do we learn from the Apostle's *preaching*? His first sermon occurs in the second chapter of the Acts. He delivered it, we are told, immediately after the special illumination of the Holy Spirit. Does it contain any thing like Trinitarianism? Not a syllable. It is thoroughly Unitarian from beginning to end. The points of doctrine it presents are these. 1. The divine mission of Jesus Christ. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man *approved of God* among you;" or, as it should be rendered, "proved unto you to be a man from God." 2. The evidence of the divinity of his mission. "By miracles and wonders and signs, which *God did by him* in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know"

3. His death, and how the event stood connected with divine providence and human agency. "*Him*, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of *God*, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and *slain*." 4. His resurrection, together with the author and proofs of it. "Whom *God hath raised up* having loosed the pains of death; . . . . . this *Jesus hath God raised up*, whereof we all are witnesses."

5. His exaltation, and to whom he was indebted for it "By the right hand of *God exalted*." 6. His possession of the promise of the Holy Spirit, dispensed through him to the first Christians, and how he came by it "Having *received* of the *Father* the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." 7. His offices, not underived, but conferred by the Most High. "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that *God hath made* that same *Jesus both Lord and Christ*."

Of this character are the doctrinal parts of Peter's first sermon. It contains not a word, as to the point in question, different from what we have quoted. Who does not see that it is Unitarian in every particular? Could one be delivered more directly opposed to Trinitarian views? And yet, free as the Apostle's preaching was from what are so much vaunted, in our day, as the "doctrines of grace," it was not without the most salutary effects. When the people heard it, "they were pricked in their heart," and said, "what shall we do?" And now we have a specimen of Peter's practical directions. Do they savor of modern Orthodoxy? Does he tell them to worship the trinity, to mourn over native and entire depravity, to confess they can do no-



thing themselves, to hope for a transfer of the penalty of their guilt to a substituted victim, or to calculate on having their moral deficiencies supplied by the imputed righteousness of Christ? As far from it as possible. He says to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." "*Save yourselves* from this untoward generation." So taught the most able and zealous of our Lord's ministers. We have too much respect for the understandings of our readers to add a single word by way of comment.

But it will be asked, perhaps, whether Peter always preached so much in the manner of a Unitarian? We will see. Another opportunity offers itself for listening to him. We find him in Solomon's porch, surrounded by a multitude, that had been drawn together by the miraculous cure he had just wrought of a lame man. (Acts iii.) He prepares to address the people. Will he, who but a little time before preached Unitarianism with such success, now adopt an entirely new course, and unfold an opposite faith? Let the recorded facts decide. The very first statement he makes involves the doctrine of God's supremacy and the inferiority of Christ. "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus." Is this Trinitarianism? Is the Son of God the very God whose son he is? Is he who is glorified the same with him who confers the glory? Peter proceeds. "Ye denied the holy one and the just, and killed the prince of life; whom God raised from the dead." Is it Jehovah that the Apostle accuses the Jews of denying and killing? Is it Jehovah that he says God raised

from the dead? The inspired preacher goes on. "Moses truly said unto the fathers, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your brethren, like unto me." This Peter applies to Christ. Look at its import. "A prophet like unto Moses," — "of their brethren," — "raised up by God!" Is this Trinitarianism? The Apostle concludes his discourse in these words. "Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Here, again, Trinitarianism is not only not recognized, but opposed. Jesus is represented simply as the *son*, the *sent* of God, while the supremacy of the Father is maintained, as it is uniformly in the teachings of this distinguished minister of the gospel.

Such as we have seen was the character of Peter's preaching. We do not believe he ever uttered a word in his public instructions, inconsistent with what we have now given. Not a single expression occurs in any of his sermons that have been reported, which can by any just rules of interpretation, be made to yield support to the doctrine of the trinity. And what was the efficacy of the sort of preaching we have been considering? Was it impotent, as some are so fond of representing Unitarianism to be? Three thousand souls were converted to the Christian faith by Peter's first sermon, and five thousand by the second!

4. Let us now regard Peter in another character than that of a preacher. He was called to perform the part of a *controvertist*. Who were his first antagonists? His countrymen, the Jews. Now consider, first, that they were exceedingly tenacious and sensitive as to their favorite doctrine of the Divine Unity; and, sec-

ondly, that it was alike their wish and their practice to seize on every plausible ground of objection to the advocates of Christianity. From these facts, what was to have been expected, on the supposition that Peter was a Trinitarian and did not conceal his opinions? Why, certainly, that he would have been opposed on this ground, by the Jews; that he would have been drawn into a controversy as to the question whether God were three persons or one; and that some traces of such a controversy would have been left on record, after the manner of his other disputes with his countrymen. But how stands the case in reality? The New Testament does not afford us the slightest hint that any such question was agitated. We therefore say that he could not have been openly a Trinitarian. So much in the way of negative proof that Peter continued to be a believer in Unitarianism.

Something more than this, however, we are able to derive from the Apostle's known conduct as a controversialist. In his discussions with the Jews on other subjects he let fall divers incidental remarks, which yield us positive evidence that he was as far as possible from being a Trinitarian. The first example we have of his controversial manner, occurs in the fourth chapter of the Acts. The chiefs of the nation "being grieved," as the historian expresses it, that the Apostles "taught the people" — what? Trinitarianism? nothing like it; but "through Jesus Christ the resurrection from the dead." So, as we are told, they "set them in the midst, and asked by what power or by what name they had done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, . .

be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye *crucified*, whom God *raised* from the *dead*, even by him, etc. Remark this language. "Jesus of Nazareth whom ye crucified." Would a Trinitarian have said this, and no more? If Peter believed Christ to be Jehovah why did he not embrace an opportunity like this for declaring his conviction? "Whom God raised from the dead." How could the Apostle have used these words, without any others by way of qualification or explanation, if he had not meant to leave on the minds of his auditors the impression of Christ's inferiority to, and dependence on, the Father Almighty?

Are we asked for another instance of Peter's controversial manner? One offers itself in the fifth chapter. He had been brought before the Council and reprimanded by the chief priests for having "filled Jerusalem with his doctrines," contrary to their express injunctions. What was his reply? "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers *raised up* Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree. Him hath *God exalted* with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour." How does this accord with Trinitarianism? Could God die? But Jesus was slain and hanged on a tree. He rose from the dead; but was it by his own inherent and independent power? No. It was by that of the one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Could the Most High be exalted? and by whom? But Jesus was exalted by the right hand of God. Christ is a Prince and a Saviour; how did he come by such a distinction? Peter says that God bestowed it upon him.

Now what has the Trinitarian to say to these things?



Does he ask for other instances of the Apostle's controversies with the Jews? There are no others on record. Does he inquire, if we have not omitted some expressions in those we have cited, which favor the doctrine of the trinity? We answer, — Not a word. It was always on Unitarian ground that Peter defended Christianity against the Jews; and we may add, it is the only ground on which it can be defended, with success, against the attacks of their descendants. Does he take up the old objection of Athanasius, and say that Peter refrained from declaring his Trinitarianism openly to his countrymen, on account of their prejudices respecting the Divine Unity? We need not dwell on the inherent improbability of this; for we happen to be informed of the Apostle's mode of presenting the truths of Christianity to the Gentiles, whose prejudices, it is well known, were so far from being favorable to Unitarianism, that they were all on the side of Polytheism. We refer to his conference with Cornelius and his friends. It may be well to quote the language he used on this occasion, at length; not, however, so much to meet the objection just stated, — for it is too weak to require a formal refutation, — as to fulfil our purpose of giving a complete view of the Apostle's system of doctrine.

5. We have, then, as another source of proof that Peter continued a Unitarian, an account, in the tenth chapter of the Acts, of his *private teachings*. We are told in the first place that Cornelius, a devout heathen, had received an extraordinary direction from God to repair to Peter, in order to be instructed in the Christian religion. We have then a statement of some special revelations made

to the Apostle, for the purpose of qualifying him for this new duty. Is the doctrine of the trinity a part of these revelations? We have not the least hint to this effect. We at length find Cornelius and his friends prepared for their interview with Peter, who immediately proceeds to instruct them in "all things (these are his words,) that had been commanded him of God." His whole discourse follows. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace *by* Jesus Christ — (he is Lord of all) — [i. e. he is master of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews] — that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how *God* anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for *God* was *with* him. And we are all witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew, and hanged on a tree; him *God* raised up the third day and showed him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did *eat and drink with him* after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it was he which was *ordained* of *God* to be the judge of quick and dead. To him gave all the prophets witness that through his name, whoever believeth in him, [whether Gentile or Jew] shall receive remission of sins."

Such is the message which Peter had received from God to deliver to Cornelius. Its whole complexion is

Unitarian. Had the arguments that have since been urged in support of Trinitarianism, then been prevalent, they could not, it seems to us, have easily had a more complete refutation. Let our readers weigh these expressions. "The word which *God sent by* Jesus Christ; how *God anointed* Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; for *God was with* him; whom they slew, him *God raised* up; it is he which is *ordained of God* to be the judge of quick and dead;"—let these expressions be impartially weighed, and then let any one say, if he can, that Peter was commissioned to teach, or that he did teach, Trinitarianism.

6. We have followed Peter as a public preacher of the gospel, as a religious controvertist among the Jews, and as a private instructor of Christianity to Cornelius and his Pagan friends. Let us now listen for a moment, in the next place, to his *devotions*. Do we hear him addressing his prayers to the trinity? Never. Does he pay religious homage to Jesus Christ? The instance is not recorded by the sacred historian. All his devotions, of which we have any account, were Unitarian. Take an example, which alone establishes the position that he was not a Trinitarian worshipper. It is given in the fourth chapter of the Acts. Peter and John had just been released from prison, and had related the circumstances of their confinement to their brethren. It was natural that, at such a season, they should unite in devout acknowledgments to their accustomed object of adoration. To whom were their devotions on this occasion offered, and in what terms? "They lifted up their voice to *God*, with one accord, and said, Lord, *thou* art God, which hast made heaven

and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against *his* Christ. For of a truth against *thy* holy *child* Jesus, whom *thou* hast *anointed*, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever *thy* hand and *thy* council determined to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of *thy* holy *child* Jesus." We examine this prayer in vain for any recognition of Trinitarian views. It is Jehovah *in one person*, the Creator of the world, that is addressed. "Lord, *thou* art God, who hast made heaven and earth," etc. Jesus Christ is represented as distinct from and subordinate to God. "Against the Lord and against *his* Christ." Our Saviour is spoken of as indebted to the Father for his appointment to the office he sustained. "*Thy* holy *child* Jesus, whom *thou* hast *anointed*." The favorite notion of a "compact between the Sacred Three," so often referred to by Trinitarian writers, is excluded, and all is ascribed to the sole purpose and execution of the One Divine Being. "To do whatsoever *thy* hand and *thy* council determined to be done." Aid is supplicated; but of whom? The one God. "And now, Lord, grant unto thy servants," etc. Jesus Christ is mentioned in the petition for miraculous powers; but how? As the author of them? No. The request is made to



God; and Jesus is spoken of only as instrumental and subordinate. "Grant . . . . . that signs and wonders may be done *by* the name of *thy* holy *child* Jesus." Further remark is unnecessary. If Peter could unite in a prayer of this character without being a Unitarian, *one's* language, it seems to us, can be relied on as an adequate medium for the communication of thought.

7. It only remains to examine the *writings* of Peter. These are comprised in one or two epistles or letters, composed by him many years after the date of what we have learned respecting him from the Acts of the Apostles. As their purpose is chiefly practical, it cannot be expected that they will be found to contain much which bears directly on the point of the present discussion. So far, however, as they afford any testimony as to the divine nature, it is decidedly in favor of our position, that Peter's views of it were Unitarian. Is it objected that he says of Christ, "to him be glory both now and forever?" 2 Peter iii. 18. Be it remembered that this is the only instance of ascription of glory or praise to Jesus, in Peter's writings. And to what does it amount? It is not said to have been the *highest* glory, such as we are required to ascribe to the Father of all; and what Unitarian would refuse to give that praise to Christ which belongs to him in his subordinate capacity of a divinely constituted Mediator and Saviour? Is stress laid on the circumstance that Peter sometimes applies the term, *Lord*, to Christ? It is enough to remark, in reply, that he quotes Sarah as calling Abraham Lord, 1 Peter iii. 6; and that nothing is more common in the Scriptures, than to designate other beings than the Deity by the same title of respect. Is it asked if the epistles of Peter

do not contain some other support of Trinitarianism than what we have now referred to? We answer confidently, Not the least. On the contrary, we find scattered on their pages such expressions as the following, which go to disprove that doctrine. "Blessed be the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." 1 Peter i. 3. "If ye call on the *Father*," etc., v. 17, not on Jesus Christ; which agrees with the words of our Saviour himself; "In that day ye shall ask *me* nothing," etc. "Who *by* him [Christ] do believe in *God* that *raised* him from the dead, and *gave* him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." v. 21. [Christ] "a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but *chosen* of *God*." ii. 4. "Spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God *by* Jesus Christ." v. 5. "For Christ hath *suffered* . . . that he might bring us to God." iii. 18. "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the *right hand* of God." v. 22. "That *God* in *all* things may be glorified *through* Jesus Christ; to whom [God] be praise and dominion for ever and ever." iv. 11. "The *God* of *all* grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory *by* Jesus Christ, make you perfect. To *Him* [God] be glory and dominion for ever and ever." v. 10. "He [Christ] *received* from *God the Father* honor and glory, when there came such a voice from the excellent glory, 'This is *my beloved son*, in whom *I am well pleased*.'" 2 Pet. i. 16.

These are all the words and phrases, we believe, that can be found in the epistles of Peter, from which any thing can be inferred as to his opinions concerning the great question at issue between us and Trinitarians.

Few, however, as they are, they afford abundant evidence to convince us that he was a Unitarian writer. It is remarkable how he uniformly distinguishes between Christ and God. The language he uses, when speaking of Jehovah, is strikingly different from that which he employs in reference to our Saviour. The former he calls "Lord God," "Faithful Creator," and the like; but never the latter. He says, "God the Father," but in no instance, God the Son. He speaks of the "will of God," as supreme; of "a good conscience towards God," etc.; but refrains from such expressions respecting Christ. In a word, he seems, almost without exception, when making mention of our Saviour, to use language with that sort of caution, which we might imagine an intelligent and thorough Unitarian would employ, who was apprehensive that his writings were some time to be searched for Trinitarian proof-texts.

We conclude with a single remark. Let it be supposed that the Apostle Peter had said, even in a single instance, (what he has never done either expressly or impliedly,) that our Saviour was *a partaker of a DIVINE NATURE*, which he actually has affirmed of Christians in his second epistle, (2 Peter, i. 4,) with what triumph would it not be now seized on by Trinitarians as an argument for the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ, incomparably stronger than what can be found for the support of that doctrine in all the productions that remain to us of this, or any other writer of the New Testament.



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[No. 10.

DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES

OF

UNITARIANISM.

BY

REV. CHARLES A. HUMPHREYS.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.

BOSTON.

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

# DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINES

OF

## UNITARIANISM.

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BY REV. CHARLES A. HUMPHREYS.

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“What think ye?” — MARK xiv. 64.

I WISH here, in addressing my fellow-believers, to set forth, as briefly as possible, the distinctive features of our faith, that we may have wherewith to answer those who approach us, saying, “What think ye?”

### 1. *What think ye of God in his personality?*

Our very name is an answer. Our theology is *Unitarian*, or monotheistic. We believe that there is one God, and one alone. Is it not strange, that, in this day of Christian enlightenment, we should have to fight over again the battle of monotheism,—the battle begun by Abraham and the Patriarchs against the heathen, continued by Moses and the Jews against the barbarians, finished by Christ and his apostles against the rest of the world, but renewed again by Unitarians against Trinitarians?

History has no record of any age that has not had its monotheism,—God never leaving himself without a witness; and, in every age, the highest science, the highest

literature, and the highest civilization, have been monotheistic. We therefore have the proud position which Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Christ, and Paul each held in his own day, — the position of defenders of God's unity. With them we stand or fall. The Trinity is a human invention, since their day. It has no Scripture language, even in which to express itself. While the Church prays, in words of its own invention, "O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons and one God!" we pray, in the words of Christ, "Our Father who art in heaven." There is need of a new dispensation, with a voice more persuasive than that of Christ, saying again, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." For the Catholic Church has put Mary before God, and all but ourselves in the Protestant Church have put Christ before God. Oh let us proclaim our faith with more zeal! and when we are asked, What think ye of God? answer, Think? I do not think: I *know* that he is one. This is no half-belief. It is one of those truths that proves itself by its harmony with instinct, intuition, science, — in fact, with every other manifestation of God. The Unitarian view finds its noblest expression in the ascription of Paul, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

## 2. *What think ye of God in his nature?*

We answer, that he is the perfection of all our highest conceptions of justice, goodness, mercy, and love. This, again, distinguishes us from all other sects.\* For they

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\* In speaking of the distinguishing doctrines held by Unitarians, I am aware that, in general, the same doctrines are held by Universalists; and they are not included in the phrase, "other sects."



regard him as alone the perfection of sovereignty, and make Christ the perfection of love, and ascribe all other perfections to the Holy Spirit; thus parcelling out the attributes of Divinity, as if they were too much to be emanations from one God alone. Here, again, we stand with Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul, ascribing all perfections to God alone, and saying, with Christ, "There is none good but one; that is, God."

### 3. *What think ye of God in his manifestations?*

We answer, that he is immanent in all his works, the fountain of all life, the foundation of all law. All life is but a manifestation of his activity; all law is but the mode of his activity; all truth is but the harmony of his activity. When he shows himself outwardly and tangibly, we call it matter, body, substance; when he shows himself inwardly and invisibly, we call it mind, soul, spirit. He is as much in one as in the other. Both nature and man are but the thoughts of God.

This view, again, distinguishes us from all other sects; for they put God apart from his creation, governing it by laws established in some past time, and, when he saw that things were about to go to rack and ruin, "incarnating his eternal word in Jesus Christ," — "God of God, very God of very God," — and now guiding all things by the Holy Spirit, "proceeding from the Father and the Son." We have no such complicate and mysterious theology to offer to the inquirer after God. We believe that God made no mistake when he created man, and that he has always been drawing him to himself: first and always by the still, small voice of conscience, then by wise lawgivers, then by inspired psalmists and prophets, then by his well-beloved Son, and now by his Holy Spirit, the Comforter, which

shall abide with us for ever. The Old Testament is the historical record of this divine guidance of the Hebrew nation, and the New Testament is the record of this divine guidance of all nations. All history is but the record of these divine manifestations. This is the noblest feature of Unitarianism, — its recognition of God in all history, or of the divine element in every man. We do not believe that God reveals himself only to here and there some favored one ; but that he gives of his spirit to all, raising one above another only as he receives more talents to be spent in God's service. It is this belief that makes us deniers of the doctrine of total depravity. We believe that in every soul, however low, is some spark of heavenly flame. We believe that only as we all are created in the image of God, can we ever hope to attain to any likeness to him in our character and life. The orthodox view is, that Adam alone was created in the image of God, and that he only retained it till he was tempted ; and that, "in his fall, we sinnèd all," and lost that image, and now — created, as they say we are, totally depraved — can only recover it through the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ. But *we* believe that God hath provided better things for us than this ingenious device of men ; that "he hath made of one blood all nations, and giveth to all life and breath and all things ; and that in him we live and move and have our being." We believe that we need no atonement, except at-one-ment in spirit, to bring us to God. We believe that we need no official intercessor with the Father ; for the Father himself loveth us, and is more willing to give than we are to ask. This was the whole aim of Christ's mission, — to bring us near to God, and make us feel his spirit in our hearts. This is the hope of the world, — that it shall recognize this divine element in every man ; for

then every man will feel a new dignity in the possession of this heavenly treasure, and a new responsibility to keep it bright and pure, away from the corroding rust of folly and of sin. But the Church has been working counter to the spirit of Christ; and whereas he tried to make us feel that we were children of God, she has used her best efforts to make us feel that we were children of Satan, and outcasts from the kingdom of heaven. Unitarianism is a protest, in the name of Christ, against this degrading of humanity in order to elevate it. We believe that humility is a sure stepping-stone to exaltation, but that depravity is a downward step to degradation. We believe in exalting human nature, not in debasing it. We believe in cherishing the spark of divinity in our souls, not in smothering it under the ashes of a forced humiliation. So much in answer to the question, What think ye of God in his manifestations? We believe that he is the life of nature, and the source of the life of man; never far away from any one of us, and always giving of his spirit directly to those who open their hearts to receive it.

#### 4. *What think ye of Christ?*

We think he is every thing which he claims to be. We think that he was commissioned by God to bring to man a new revelation of himself, and endowed by God with every power that was necessary to fix this revelation in the hearts of men. We think that his nature was like our own; that he was tempted in all points like as we are; that he struggled through the wilderness of doubt as we must struggle; that he drank of the cup of bitterness as we must drink, and was baptized with the baptism of sorrow as we must be baptized; that he prayed for strength



as we must pray, and overcame the world as we must overcome; that, at last, he gained the victory over death, and thanks be to God that He giveth us also the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. This doctrine again, strange to say, separates us from most Christians; for all others have thrust upon Christ a divinity that he did not claim, and exalted him upon a throne that he steadfastly refused. Unitarianism denies to Christ this official divinity that the Church has invented, and ascribes to him that spiritual divinity which he continually asserted of himself. "The Son can do nothing of himself; but whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." We believe that Christ's life was the clearest reflection of the divine that has ever been lived on the earth. We know that we are all created in the image of God; but we believe, with the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Christ was "the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of his person." So we find in Christ not a God condescending to humanity, but humanity rising up to God; not a God for us to worship, but an example for us to follow. If Christ should come among us to-day, the Church would again offer him — as Satan did in the wilderness — the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; but it would hear again, in tones of sterner rebuke, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." I thank God that we, as Unitarians, would have nothing to offer him but a throne in our inmost hearts. There we will enshrine him; and while he prays, "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one," we shall know that we have given him the only throne that he ever sought, and paid him the only honor that he ever claimed.



### 5. *What think ye of the Holy Spirit?*

We believe that it is the creative energy and activity of God; not a personality, but a personification. From the necessities of language, when we speak of God working in the world, we say he works by his Holy Spirit; when we speak of his helping man, we say that he gives his Holy Spirit; when we speak of man refusing his help, we say he quenches God's Holy Spirit: and so the Bible always speaks, not of personality, but of the personification of God's creative and revealing agency in the world. The Holy Spirit is God manifesting himself. We believe that his Holy Spirit never leaves the world, that it will abide with us for ever; that God is always ready to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask it; and that it is another name for the Spirit of Truth, which dwells in the hearts of all who try to guide their actions by the eternal principles of right. Herein we do not differ so much from other Churches. For although they assert in their creeds, that the Holy Spirit is a distinct person in the Godhead, they practically ignore its personality, and speak of it, as we do, as an influence proceeding from God. Still, we should not the less congratulate ourselves, that our belief is consistent with our practice; and that, when we address the throne of grace, we do not have to stop and think whether we will pray to God or Christ or the Holy Spirit. We bow the knee to God alone.

### 6. *What think ye of man in his nature?*

We believe that he was created in the image of God; that, so far as he has spiritual powers and aspirations, so far is he a partaker of the Divine nature. We believe that the soul of the child is as pure as the source from which

it came in the bosom of the Father in heaven. We are not blind to the burden of hereditary evil that sometimes seems to crush this pure soul. That is the result of physical laws, which execute themselves with unerring precision. The soul must of necessity encounter them in its earthly life; and it is often met, at the outset of its pilgrimage, with such a force of hereditary predispositions to evil, that it never in this life outgrows them. But these do not constitute guilt, until the soul has of its own will yielded to them. Herein we differ widely from other sects. For they assert, that the soul is in its essence sinful, and burdened with the guilt of Adam, and can be saved only by an acceptance of the infinite atonement of Jesus Christ. The Confession of the New-England Congregational Churches, like that of the Westminster Divines, describes man as "dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body, and therefore bound over to the wrath of God." We set against this horrid invention of the Church theologians, the simple declaration of Christ, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," and that most solemn warning, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

#### 7. *What think ye of man in his destiny?*

We believe that he is endowed with powers capable of infinite development; that he is allowed free course to work out his own salvation, yet is so hedged in by God's law, and encompassed by God's love, that he cannot always resist the pleadings of God's Spirit, but will sometime take and keep the path of eternal blessedness and peace. Life is a divine flame; and though at times it seems to be smothered by sin and extinguished in death, yet we

believe it is never utterly quenched; but that, through God's mercy, it will shine on and on unto the perfect day.

Thus have I tried to give, as simply and concisely as possible, the distinguishing doctrines of religion as held by the majority of Unitarians. I have given no half-beliefs. I believe them with my whole soul, because they are in harmony with nature, with Scripture, with science, and with the highest instincts in man. If I should put them in the form of a creed, to be repeated by the devout believer, it would be like this:—

I believe in God as the Creator of the world, the Former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits; and I desire, in sincerity and in truth, to worship him alone. I believe in Jesus as the well-beloved Son of God, sent to be the way, the truth, and the life; and I will try to walk in his way, to learn his truth, and to live his life. I believe in the Holy Ghost as the creative energy of God in the world, and the guiding, sustaining, and revealing influence of God in the soul; and I will strive always to keep my soul open to this influence. I believe in man,—in his birthright as a child of God, in his duty to obey God, and his destiny to become like God. I believe in prayer,—that it is the highest privilege and the deepest help to the soul. I believe in life,—that it is the test of opinion, the groundwork of faith, and the condition of salvation. I believe in the Cross,—that it lies in the path of my daily duty; and I would take it up trustingly, and bear it on joyfully. I believe in the Crown,—that it lies in the path of my heavenly destiny; and to snatch its peerless glories I will run and not be weary, I will strive and not faint.

This I would call a living creed. In such beliefs are gathered the faith and trust of all true disciples; in such doctrines are bound up the hope of the world. They are

built on the foundation of eternal truth, and will outlast all the shocks of time. Let us therefore boldly proclaim these beliefs; and, while we live with our neighbors in the spirit of charity, let us never yield one jot in the assertion of these essential truths.

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ORTHODOXY  
AND  
LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

*Compared and Contrasted.*

BY  
REV. HENRY W. BELLOWS, D.D.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,  
BOSTON.

CAMBRIDGE:  
PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

# ORTHODOXY AND LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

## COMPARED AND CONTRASTED.

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BY HENRY W. BELLOWS.

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**I** PROPOSE in these few pages briefly to sketch the opposition of opinion on the main points between Unitarians and the so-called Orthodox sects, taking these sects together in a large way as being agreed in what is commonly considered the creed of Christendom.

Of course, my sketch will be rapid, superficial, and imperfect; but I mean it to be candid, plain, and as nearly true as my own prejudices will permit it to be. I must use a directness not common, perhaps, in these days; but I hope it will be a godly simplicity, and to many I must seem very commonplace.

Orthodoxy, then, represents God characteristically as a sovereign bound by certain stern laws imposed by his own holiness, which brought him, from the existence of the first human being, into a terrible conflict with the human race, who by the sin of Adam became enemies of God, and doomed to eternal ruin. Out of this ruin man was snatched, so far as he accepts the conditions of faith in Christ, by the interposition of a second person in an assumed Trinity, — the Son of God, — a being uncreated and eternal, equal with God, who offered himself in place

of guilty man; took flesh, and came into the world; delivered the message of mercy, and died to expiate with his blood the guilt of the race. Human salvation thus made possible, man appropriates its fruits by faith in the terms of it, which is called receiving the benefits of the atonement; while those who reject these terms, either from not being able or willing to receive them, or because they never hear of them,—like the heathen,—fall under the original curse, and go to the everlasting burnings of the bottomless pit.

Unitarians discard this whole scheme as in their judgment a mythical, fabulous, irrational, incredible system, descended from ignorant and credulous times, and not justified by Christ's words or spirit. They regard God as characteristically a Father rather than a Sovereign, and think his chosen name of Love makes any original curse of the human race an impossible fable. They reject the doctrine of the Trinity, invented by theologians in the second century, as a cumbrous, scholastic scheme, lacking coherency and even intelligibility; and give Christ the position he claims as the Son of God, created and subordinate, — God's representative, messenger, and plenipotentiary, — who shall one day give up his power as the Head of the Church to his Father, "that God may be all in all." With Unitarians the atonement is simply the at-one-ment, or bringing together of man with God, — the reconciliation of the child, alienated from his Father by sin and ignorance, with his ever-loving Parent, — an opinion in direct contrast with that dogma known as the vicarious atonement, and esteemed the most tender and precious doctrine of the Orthodox Church; which represents God as being himself the party to be reconciled; as having been since Adam's fall in infinite anger with his children, and propitiated by the death of his innocent Son towards the



penitent and converted, but still angry and wrathful with the impenitent and the unconverted, who always form the vast majority of his creatures.

Unitarians do not believe the Orthodox dogma of an original fall, changing the moral nature of man. They believe man originally and still created upright, innocent, and capable of virtue and holiness, subject, of course, to hereditary influences, both good and bad; feeble only through ignorance and exposure, and often perverted by his want of training and the evil example around him.

And this view they hold in opposition to the doctrine of native, inborn, universal depravity, derived, with the curse that accompanied it, from Adam's fall. Regeneration with them is the orderly and normal awakening of the spiritual nature from its sleep in the purely animal or merely instinctive nature, as opposed to the notion of a miraculous change in the moral constitution of the soul. The Holy Spirit is for them the recognized influence of God's ever-loving and sanctifying breath, always blowing, but not filling our spiritual lungs, until we expand them voluntarily to receive it; in opposition to the doctrine of a third person in the Trinity, whose influence is to be invited by doctrinal convictions and professions, and whose presence is occasional, exceptional, and peculiar. The Bible they reverence as a most wonderful and sacred book, containing, in the Old Testament, the general literature, sacred, historical, and poetic, of the Jewish people; written in large part by wholly unknown authors, and under the ordinary lights of human knowledge, and with all the ordinary subjection to human errors; with exalted passages from minds lifted far above their time and filled with truth and holiness, that will last as long as the world stands; but yet a book to be read without superstitious literality, and with a free and rational, yet reverential and

devout, discrimination. Of the New Testament they speak as the record of a revelation, made by ear and eye witnesses, by men religiously inspired, yet not free from the prejudices, and theoretical and even practical errors of their times; and therefore not binding upon us in the servile way of an acceptance of its statements after a purely grammatical examination of the meaning of the text. It is not merely a grammar and lexicon, but a human soul in the largest and greatest use of its faculties, which can interpret the New Testament. The Bible is not the mechanical work of the Holy Spirit, employing patriarchs, prophets, and apostles to write its communications out, as mediums in a nervous frenzy pretend to write out the messages of invisible spirits; but the record of what holy men thought and said as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, which is not a mere dictator, but an *influence*, operating not independently, but through the agency, of human thoughts and feeling, and of course allying itself often with what is temporary, partial, and even mistaken; just as the pure evening breeze from the sea, bringing health far into the interior to the parched and wilted invalid melted by the summer heats, brings, nevertheless, odors of the land over which it passes, — and perhaps not always fragrant ones, — mixed with its saline breath. Unitarian Christians entertain different theoretical views of the connection between this world and the other, from so-called Orthodox Christians. *They* call the world a physical ruin, all its courses disjointed in the original twist given to it by the introduction of sin, which cursed the ground. They consider life as a vale of tears, a fallen world, a necessarily sad and wretched experience; a period of probation for an existence which will not fairly begin till we are dead and risen again on the other side of Time, and which will begin only in eternal misery and ruin

for all who are not here converted to a special view of Christ's sacrifice, and do not accept his atonement in a technical and saving sense.

In this terrible exposure, with what decency can human beings, surrounded by millions of dying souls in peril of everlasting ruin, give any legitimate attention to their own immediate interests or pleasures, spend any time in leisure or enjoyment, indulge any self-gratifications or private tastes, or do any thing which does not have reference to the salvation of souls? On the contrary, Unitarian Christians regard life, eternal life, as beginning when the soul begins, and as independent of time and place. They consider this world as being God's residence as much as any other; that happiness is as legitimate here as in heaven; that life is not wholly for *some ulterior* end, but is partly its own end, and that every part of it is an end in itself; that God lives to make his children happy now and always; that our education is going on now, and will always be going on; that we learn, by care and by freedom from care, by what is serious and by what is gay, that God is interested in our business, our pleasures, our cares, our affections, our tasks, our virtues, our piety; and that ascetic, terrifying, and exclusive views of life and futurity—views which interdict a large part of human nature and ostracize all but a special set of faculties,—deform and dwarf the soul, and bring in, sooner or later, a fearful re-action, which makes religion hated and God defied. Unitarians believe that these views make the roundest, soundest characters,—characters in which the moral graces and charities are most honestly and substantially developed; characters that show their worth in business, in the home-circle, and in all the various spheres of public and private usefulness. They are afraid of severe or superstitious or ecclesiastical views of piety, as making self-deceived, sentimental, and often hypocritical



characters. They do not fancy people who think a special class is set apart for the covenanted mercies of the Almighty God; that only the favored few, elected by grace, are sprinkled with saving blood; that heaven is a narrow garden, fenced in with flaming swords, where, according to some learned doctors, the blessed have their joys augmented by contemplating from afar the smoke of the torments of the lost millions that fill the ever-opening jaws of all-devouring hell.

Those who imagine that mild views of God's character and purposes, or wide and charitable hopes for the human race, or tender and encouraging sympathies towards our great, struggling brotherhood, or belief in human progress and in the ultimate redemption of men, tend to moral license, encourage vice, soften the energies of the will, or dull the edge of the conscience, can know little of the history of crime, of the experiences of penal law, of the principles of human nature. All great philanthropists and explorers of the means of suppressing vice and crime unite in recommending generous laws, — mild punishments, — mild, but sure, and as swift in their application as may be; with a still greater reliance, however, in the saving of the vicious, on encouragements and inducements to virtue, than on fear of punishment. One common school does more to reduce a noisy, vicious neighborhood to order than a dozen policemen! One gentle, tender-hearted visitor to a jail will sometimes soften and shape the hearts of the obdurate, who have long defied punishment and threats. The world can never be scared out of its sins. Even brutes are now broken to the rein by kindness, and not by red-hot bars of iron and bits of jagged steel; and the human soul defies scornfully those who come in the name of God to invite it to heaven by the fears of an eternal and flaming hell! Who is this Calvinistic God, that any of us should love him, who hates



so many of our feeble race? Who is this God who is to make us worship him for his goodness, while millions like ourselves are writhing in the tortures of his unrelenting hand? No Andersonville prison, with its Wirtzes and Winders, summoning the world to curse its systematic cruelties, deserves one iota of the loathing and hatred with which the united race should repel the idea of a predestined ruin in a flaming pit for endless ages, — the penalty of helpless ignorance and an hereditary depravity; and visited on those who sit in heathen darkness just as remorselessly as upon those who reject the clearest light of the gospel.

Unitarians reject and repel this abortive conception of an ignorant and violent age, as blasphemous to God, and dishonoring to Christ, and depraving to humanity. They denounce it as a cruel rendering into prosaic fact of certain pictorial phrases, fitted, perhaps, to move a rude people nineteen centuries ago; but unworthy to be handed down, stereotyped into doctrine, taught with awful shows of so-called inspired texts, and fastened upon the conscience and the fears of the timid with nails driven by masters of assemblies. They assert, that such terrible conceptions are not necessary either to arrest attention, to arouse the conscience, or to win the soul to the invitation of Christ. They have tried another way, and are satisfied with it. They believe the age of fearful doses and purgings and bleedings and scarifications and starving and stifling — in the name of the healing art — has gone by; that food, carefully chosen, is taking the place of medicine; while exercise, and air, and moderation, and cheerful society, and honest and various occupation and innocent amusement are better prescriptions, and commoner ones from modern medical skill, than any which are carried in bad Latin to the apothecary's, and brought back in nauseous

drugs and poisons. And so they solemnly and deliberately, with the fear of God before their eyes, choose to present God exclusively as Infinite Love, and never as Eternal Wrath, — Infinite Love, not hampered and hindered by its own attributes, so that it cannot manifest itself practically; but with a godlike and sovereign freedom to act as lovingly as its celestial spirit prompts. This love was not exhibited in the merciful Jesus in contrast with his Father's awful justice, but shown by him as the express image of God's eternal love; so that the mercy of Christ is the mercy of God, and there is no divine justice which is not heavenly mercy too.

My brethren, it takes courage to join a little body of Christians that entertain notions so opposed to the current creed of Christendom: it requires an intellectual, a moral, a spiritual independence, which all do not possess. But are not views so precious, inspiring, all-reconciling as these worth contending for, worth suffering for, worth dying for, were we living in a persecuting age? At an era when, instead of scornful words and denunciations, the fagot and the axe punished such gentle heresies as ours, Biddle, one of the earliest of English Unitarians, was in danger of the stake for views like these. Now we are merely scorched in the imaginations of our Christian opponents, — a penalty which it is not very hard to bear.

I know nothing more important to the interests of the Christian world and the cause of virtue, purity, truth, and piety, than that it should be everywhere known that there are people of intelligence, benevolence, rectitude, and reverence who entertain these liberal and rational views; who have ceased to associate faith with superstition, or stability of Christian belief with deafness and blindness to the fresh testimonies of science and experience; or love of God with contempt for the visible creation, our pres-

ent sphere; or hope of immortality with a systematic depreciation of our immediate existence. I firmly believe that a Liberal Christian, consistently conscientious and devout, after our generous pattern, — who is seen to be no self-seeker, no worldling; known as an enemy of vice, folly, and selfishness; an upright, pure, benevolent, and spiritually-minded person, — has an influence in these times in the way of upholding the gospel and putting down practical atheism, and that worst infidelity which consists in unfaithfulness to Christ's precepts and spirit, which no Orthodox Christian can exceed, and which few can equal. I devoutly believe, that, were it not for the testimony which Liberal Christians have offered against technical tests and dogmatic standards of character, the popular religion of this country would by degrees have taken on the form of Roman Catholic formalism, or Puritanical sourness and narrowness; leaving the intelligent classes in the state in which they were found in England at the close of the last century, with Hume and Gibbon sneering, in the name of science and culture, at a Christianity which produced such fruits: or as it is in France at this day, where religion, in any form, is regarded by the science and literature, the statesmanship and wealth and influence of the country, as a convenient means of governing the masses, but in itself a matter quite unworthy to interrupt the more engaging and valuable pursuits of people concerned with actual facts and practical questions and immediate pleasures! If Unitarians, as often complained, are not seen to be duly consecrated to Christian usefulness, to the devout imitation of Christ, to the building-up of God's kingdom in the world, it is not the fault of their system or of their opinions. But, mainly so far as it is a true criticism, it is due to the fact, that the self-consecration of the soul on these principles is a larger, higher, grander work than upon the cur-



rent theological grounds, and that few persons wholly worthy of their exalted standard appear. But is the criticism sound at bottom? It is true, that Unitarian Christians do not bear the ear-marks of the popular pietism, that they are not characterized by the use of the technical language of the sects about them, nor by the facial expression or special traditional manners of theological saints; but if those who trade with them, live with them, know them through and through, do not find them at least on a level with other Christians in their integrity, their moderation, their purity and truth, their mingled love and fear of God, their sincere and tender reverence for Christ's authority, example, and spirit, then let their pretensions be scorned and their claims to lead on the Church be derided! God knows we have reason enough to be humble, in view of our unfaithfulness to our own ideal. We ought, under the inspiration of principles like ours, to make the world ring with our exemplary Christian lives, and high and holy deeds and influences. A true and engaging piety ought to flow with prodigious power through our special channels. The earnest minds and hearts of the world, instead of expending energies in holding up the crumbling walls of Trinitarian and Calvinistic theology, or cooing the restless and unmatchable staves of a barrel that no longer holds securely the water of life, ought, with one consent, to turn to and endeavor to establish that Rational, Liberal Christianity which is as certainly prefigured by the shadows of coming events, and destined ultimately to be the creed of Christendom, as noon is to follow morning; and every timid man or woman, suppressing the soul's convictions, practising on grounds of policy and fashion a coldness towards our views they do not feel; averting the eyes, or affecting a horror or distrust for rational Christianity; going with the multitude and joining



the popular sects without believing their creeds, — is guilty of a treacherous meanness of spirit, is grieving the spirit of truth, is delaying the triumph of the gospel.

I know no class of persons in a more hopeless condition than Unitarians who will not avow their views and adjust their religious profession to their convictions, and join with those who agree with them in seeking to make popular and influential a new type of Christianity. There were plenty of these timid Christians in Christ's time, who died in the bondage of the Mosaic law, because they dared not be among the few to profess their faith in the "good news" he brought; plenty of Protestants in Luther's glorious day, who died in the Romish Church because they had not the courage to welcome and own the light that had really penetrated their minds. If the Liberal Christians in America could be known to each other, — could rise like one man at a given signal, and discover in what formidable numbers they exist, what a mass of intelligence, character, influence, and worth they carry, — they might achieve a momentous triumph in a twelvemonth.

Were our singularity and newness done away with, — our full force actually brought into view, — we should at once give over all controversy with Orthodoxy, and go to work in redeeming the world from moral ignorance and spiritual death. Let confidence in our views, let a sense of our real strength visit the Liberal-Christian mind, and it will claim the popular will and heart; it will place itself at the head of all reform, to soften and Christianize their spirit; it will accept science to interpret its religious meaning, philosophy to show its harmony with Christian truth, and teach the world how to blend the light of faith with reason, and the interests of time with those of eternity. A devout spirit in a thoroughly free mind; a faith in Christ, purchased at no loss of mental energy and freedom; love

of God and fellowship with the Saviour, freed from technical and formal conditions, and become as genuine and natural as with the early Christians, — what wondrous victories are not waiting for this potent spell, this wholly new and glorious union of things long falsely held incompatible? Oh! in a country that is always doing what is impossible; that can disprove the time-hallowed fallacies, that governments of the people are necessarily weak, that liberty is essentially anarchical, that breadth of territory is fatal to cohesion, that great armies cannot be disbanded without violence, and must always threaten the civil law, — in a great country like ours, must not, shall not Liberal Christianity be proved to be a possibility? Has not God made America for the triumph of this true Catholicism? this broad, luminous, rational, free, yet practical, binding, inspiring, spiritualizing faith? Let us believe so, and we shall make it so.

Let there be no mistake where our flag is. Recognizing the services of all Christian sects, and honoring them according to their faithfulness, knowing that they still have great and glorious works to do, and always ready and glad to praise and bless their various usefulness, I never can lose sight of our own special cause, nor undervalue its sacred and precious obligations. We stand, in every community where a church of our faith exists, for faith in the ever-living and ever-opening gospel, — a gospel which existed before any of the creeds that embody it, and will live long after they are all forgotten; a gospel which has no shackles for the body or for the mind; which is not afraid of the geologist's hammer or the astronomer's tube or the naturalist's microscope; which believes in man as God's inalienable child, and in Christ as God's free mercy, and in God as the Universal Father, against whose mighty and eternal love neither Adam's sins nor ours can stand

up as permanent barriers to its glorious, beneficent, and universal course; a gospel of common sense, of generous sympathies, of broad charity, of practical beneficence, which claims to come from Christ's lips, which hopes to fold the whole world in its gentle arms, and which is not afraid to trust itself, in life and in death, as the appointed way of salvation and the gate of eternal life!

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Ten Points of Difference

BETWEEN

UNITARIANISM AND "ORTHODOXY."

BY

REV. WILLIAM C. TENNEY.

AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION  
BOSTON.



# TEN POINTS OF DIFFERENCE

BETWEEN

## UNITARIANISM AND "ORTHODOXY."

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BY REV. WILLIAM C. TENNEY.

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IN the following pages I shall present statements, briefly contrasting my own theological views with the current, popular "orthodoxy." I prefer to speak in the first person, on account of the diversities of opinion existing in our Unitarian fellowship, pledged, as it is, to a broad-thoughted, large-hearted liberality. Disclaiming thus the right to speak for others, I nevertheless avow my confident conviction, that the opinions given below as my own express substantially the belief prevailing among Unitarian Christians everywhere. And in the statements I make concerning the common Trinitarian belief, I neglect the points of difference among the various "orthodox" denominations, singling out only those doctrines in which they all agree. My object is not to *argue* (except incidentally), but to *state*.

I. "Orthodoxy" represents God as existing in *three persons*, who are yet but *one God*. These three persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; each eternal, each a conscious personality; each infinite in physical and

moral attributes, such as power, wisdom, holiness, mercy, truth; each entitled to whatever can be declared of the word "God," and, all together, *only* God. The term can be used of each in turn and of all collectively, so that I may say the Father is God with all the attributes of God, the Son is God with all the attributes of God, and the Holy Spirit is God with all the attributes of God, and yet there is but one God, — the Father, Son, AND Holy Spirit. Each may be worshipped as very God, and all three are to be worshipped as the *One* God.

I believe, in the words of the apostle Paul, that "to us there is but one God, the Father;" the supreme, only object of adoration; that the doctrine of the Trinity, as the view just given is called, cannot be stated in Bible language, and gradually grew up in the Church from Greek and Oriental metaphysics; that the existence and perfection of the adorable God, in one person, the Father, is clear, simple, biblical, true, spiritual, practical.

II. The popular theology views *Jesus Christ* as a being made up of two natures, united in one person, that is, in one consciousness, one will; one nature infinite and divine, the other finite and human; one, the second person in the Trinity, existing from all eternity, the other nature human, limited, commencing in time. *He* (mark the word *he*, which denotes personality) is infinite and finite, mortal and yet deathless; knew all things, yet could say "no man knoweth the hour, not even the Son, but the Father only;" *he* was the eternal God, yet was born of a human mother; *he* created the world, yet died the death of the cross on Calvary.

I believe that, while all men are sons of God, Jesus Christ was pre-eminently THE "Son of God;" the chosen and best beloved Son in moral likeness to, and spiritual



sympathy with, the one God, the universal Father; the Son in the greatness of his mission, the glory and completeness of his moral character. In him I see reflected the attributes of the Infinite God, acting on a finite scale. He is to me the type of perfected human nature, the being who, by the power of his life and death, helps mankind up toward his own level. He is, in my view, the Mediator, not as standing between God and man, and acting an official part, but as allowing all of God morally to manifest himself through him; the glory of the infinite and paternal God, beaming in the softened light of humanity. As to his rank in the realm of being, there are wide differences of opinion among Unitarians; but, for myself, I do not hesitate to say, I believe him to have been the son of Joseph and Mary, and the doctrine of his miraculous conception, gradually growing up as a legend in the age succeeding his wonderful life, to have attached itself to the fragmentary biographies of him in "Matthew" and "Luke."

III. The popular theology insists, I suppose without exception, on the *native total depravity* of mankind, however variously explained. I understand it to assert, that man is averse from, and unable to do, any good thing, till regenerated by the power of the Divine Spirit; thoroughly and totally corrupt by nature in motive and in act, and that sin is an infinite evil, whose penalty is eternal suffering.

I believe the phrase "native depravity" (I care not how defined) to be a contradiction in terms, for no being is blamable for what he cannot help; and *total* depravity to be about as false a doctrine as can be in fact and in philosophy. The amount of sin in the world (and by *sin* I mean the conscious, voluntary doing what the doer believes to

be, or might have ascertained to be, *wrong*) is indeed fearfully great. Sin is a condition of human discipline and education. Frail, imperfect man, to attain to what God has destined for him, must pass through its momentous trial. Pascal expressed it all when he said, "Oh the grandeur and the littleness, the excellence and the corruption, the majesty and the meanness, of life!" Inherited *propensities*, who can deny? Inherited *guilt*—how can it be believed? Self-love is a natural and therefore commendable principle; the *excess* of self-love is *selfishness*, which is sin. To rightly *proportion* the various elements of our nature is the work of life. Sin is the not attempting this, or but partly attempting; more or less culpable as the case may be, never quite irremediable.

IV. The *atonement* "orthodoxy" regards as an act, which is the only procuring means of salvation, rescuing the believer in it from eternal torment, which were else his doom. I think I do not misrepresent the opinions of any one of the prevalent sects in stating, that, by their theology, those who die in infancy, inheriting, as they do, a corrupt and totally depraved nature, are saved from perdition in a future world only by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. So encompassed by embarrassing objections is this doctrine, which is nevertheless the corner-stone of the "orthodox" faith, that a multitude of theories and explanations have been put forth to relieve and rationalize it. Common to all is the belief that the human race has incurred the penalty of endless woe on account of sin, and by no unaided efforts of its own can escape this doom. The death of Jesus Christ is a divine expedient for the rescuing man from this deserved fate, while saving the justice and honor and truth of God. Hence, a person of the eternal three in the Godhead becomes united with a

being of human birth and experience, who expires at length in the agonies of the cross to reconcile God to man. Some say Jesus Christ suffered and died only as man; others say he suffered also as God. Some regard his death as a literal sacrifice to appease the Father; others view his crucifixion as a scenic exhibition of God's wrath against sin, and the whole plan of atonement as a governmental scheme for self-vindication. It is a penalty paid, a debt discharged, a satisfaction exacted, or a conflict of divine attributes harmonized. Christ's holiness is imputed to believers; their sins are imputed to him. He suffers the agony due to them for ever and ever, and so God's justice is satisfied and he can forgive (how "forgive," when the debt has been already paid, I have never seen explained). All agree in saying that Christ's death had a reconciling effect on the mind of God, and that those who are saved are saved by the procuring virtue of what Christ has endured and done for them.

Both which assertions I absolutely deny. God never required appeasing: his very nature is Love. He needed to have no way opened in order to pardon: the way was always open. His justice and mercy demanded no harmonizing, for they were never at even so much as *constructive* variance. Christ's death had no special efficacy, no isolated office. It was the crowning sacrifice of his disinterested, devoted life, for the good of men. And whatever of saving efficacy is in the life, work, sufferings, and death of Jesus is wrought *upon* and *within* the heart; has no substitutional, sacrificial, in fine, *purchasing* power *over* and *for* us; but a touching, persuading, winning, converting power on the opened and sympathizing mind and heart of erring, estranged, frail, sinful man. I lack words to express my sense of the incoherence, irrationality, and general *shockingness* of the common view of the atone-

ment. Sin and holiness are no matters of imputation; penalty cannot be substitutional, and in none of God's works in nature can we find a hint of any thing so confused, awkward, incongruous, out of the divine style (so to speak), as this whole scheme, elaborated, I would say in passing, in the thick darkness of the dark ages. Christ's work is to reconcile man to God, not God to man; and he does this by revealing and illustrating God's tender, patient, parental, forgiving, all-comprehending, unwearied love. The spectacle on Calvary was no signal of the reversal of the condition of a part of a doomed and helpless world; but "I, if I be lifted up," said Jesus, "will draw all men unto me." And he is doing it: the blessed work is ever going on.

V. *Regeneration*, by the prevailing theology, is the supernatural moving of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, by which the sinner is instantaneously rescued from the ranks of those who are exposed to unending misery, and enrolled in the number of those to whom, through Christ's merits, eternal bliss is promised.

Regeneration is, in my view, the changing from irreligiousness to practical religiousness, by whatever means brought about, and whether by rapid or gradual steps. And it saves a man, in that he becomes better, and thus more blessed. In its nature it is eminently rational and practical, and is the result of the co-operation of the spirit of man with that spirit of God whose breathings on the human soul are never entirely suspended. Enthroning Christianity as the rule of life is regeneration.

VI. The current "orthodoxy" limits *probation* to this life, and makes the condition of the soul in a future state of existence one of fixed and perfect and eternal joy on



the one hand, or, on the other, of unutterable woe, for ever and ever, world without end. These fleeting earthly years, so infinitesimally few and brief, and so crowded with ignorance and imperfection, are the irrecoverable probation-time, dismissing innumerable millions on millions to a state of immitigable anguish as unending as the future eternity of God himself.

While, to state such a doctrine is to refute it, I will only say, that, not denying a probationary character to every period of our being, I regard the more suitable term for life to be *disciplinary* or *educational*. It is impossible for me to believe, that the eternal destiny of all spirits is suspended on the volitions and actions of this veriest infancy of their being. Every period of life is probationary and preparatory to those which follow; and I believe it will be so hereafter, not less than here. Death is but an incident, an *early* incident, of man's existence; and God, who is Love, who sees the end from the beginning, who fills all time, all worlds, eternity itself, whose Providence is all-comprehending, whose mercy is unwearyed, is leading on, *educating*, ruling, overruling for his own wise and kind purpose, for ever and ever; and no creature he has made, will he leave abandoned and finally undone.

VII. The *Bible* is regarded by the popular Trinitarian belief as the infallibly inspired oracle of absolute truth, the correctness of all whose teachings from the opening chapter of Genesis to the final word of the Book of Revelation must be unwaveringly believed and inflexibly maintained. It is habitually spoken of as THE "word of God."

The Bible is to me a book made up of many books, of a great variety of character, written under great diversities

of circumstance and culture, with the evident traces of human opinions on a multitude of topics, in connection with the noblest and most resplendent spiritual truths, so immeasurably in advance of their age as to indicate a divine inspiration. History, biography, poetry, and drama are scattered through its many pages, imparting moral lessons of unequalled value and richness. It shuts us not up to the belief in a completed and oracular infallibility, an endowment it neither possesses nor claims. With very unequal merits in its different portions, it is the "autobiography of human nature from its infancy to its perfection;" and its crowning excellence is in the glimpses it gives us of the Divine Man, whose transcendent life is, and is ever to be, for the nourishment and growth of humanity. So would I read it, discriminatingly, reverentially, gratefully, but not allowing it to seal up the understanding against ever-unfolding and developing religious truth.

VIII. And this leads me to remark, that, in the ordinary theological treatment of it, *reason* is alternately patronized and discarded. Against Romanism and its dogmas and rites, the popular Protestantism uses reason with uncompromising energy, vehemence, and ridicule, allowing the claim of no self-styled infallible church as interpreter of an infallible Bible. But to free, inquiring criticism, philosophy, and science, this same Protestantism utters deprecations and warnings against blind and false and proud and misleading human reason, and throws itself back for absolute truth on an assumed infallible Book, though interpreted by fallible men.

I believe in the trustworthiness of reason, using, of course, all the helps of Bible, church, history, criticism, and science, of which it can avail itself. Say what any

man or all men will, of the poverty and fallibility of reason, whatever is plainly irrational we are bound to reject, wherever we may meet with it. To me Jesus Christ is the great spiritual authority, because, having carefully examined his religion, I find it coincident with the highest reason of which I know.

IX. "Orthodoxy" preaches *a resurrection of the material body*, — a dogma I reject as being neither scriptural nor rational, but utterly inadmissible and confusing. It looks for a future visible coming of Christ in the sky to hold an assize of the universe; the Judge awarding to the awakening and arising myriads of the dead an eternity of bliss, or shutting up in an everlasting prison. I believe in his figurative coming in the first Christian century, when Jerusalem was destroyed, and the new religion, liberated from Jewish entanglements, became universal. I believe in his spiritual coming again and again, the enthronement of his truth as the rule of moral award in the conscience of the world through the ages. With no dramatic pomp, no sounding trumpet, no rending tombs and awaking dead, does he come to judgment, but in the secrecy of the individual soul, in the "power and great glory" of his widening, purifying, and elevating truth and love.

X. *Faith* is, in the common view, the believing, with a realizing confidence, in the Trinity, human depravity, the all-sufficiency of the vicarious atonement, eternal retribution, and the infallible inspiration of the whole of the Bible; and salvation (deliverance from sin, and particularly its eternal torments) results from this belief. Whoso believes not thus in Christ "must everlastingly perish."

Faith in Jesus is, I maintain, no adhesion to any array of dogmas, mysterious or otherwise, but sympathy with

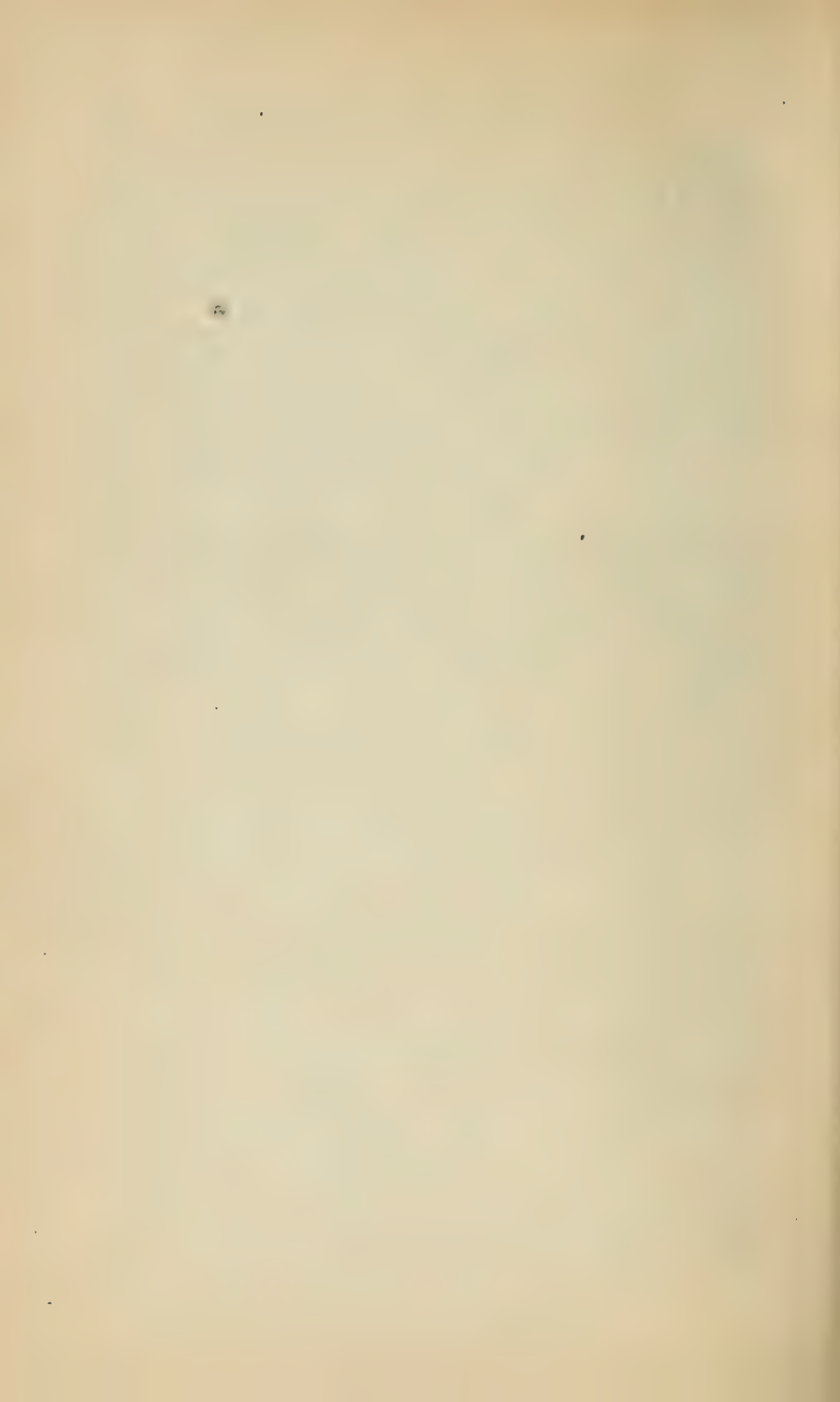
him in the whole spirit of his words and works. He who has this faith is saved, — delivered, that is, from the worst mental and spiritual miseries, here and hereafter ; he who believeth not is damned (the correct translation of the original Greek word is *condemned* or *judged*), left, that is, to grope in the blindness and misery, the broodings, the repinings, the bitterness, the rebellion, or the discouragement and despair of sin. Christ came to bring light and life. *Believe*, that is, *trust*, and be saved. Dogmas cannot save. His *spirit of life* CAN.

It will not improbably be said by some who read these pages, We cannot believe that the doctrines above recited are all maintained by the dominant sects. Certainly we have seldom or never heard them brought prominently or emphatically forward in their pulpits. There is a softening of the old tenets, a growing liberality of opinion, and, after all, less discrepancy than you suppose between their views and your own. To which I reply, All these articles are to be found in the confessions of faith of the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist Churches. Whatever suppression or softening of obnoxious tenets may be enforced on their pulpits by the power of a growing liberalism and the imperious demands of policy, the tenets themselves are all imbedded in their creeds. And let a clergyman in one of these denominations dare to question, *in public*, the truth of the Trinity, the Godhead of Christ, the vicarious atonement, the infallibility of the Bible, or eternal hell-torments, his official decapitation, by an ecclesiastical court-martial, is almost sure to speedily follow.

Reader, which series of these contrasted views appears the more simple and reasonable? Which would seem to have the more faith in the fatherly love of God? Which



presents the more hopeful and cheering view of human life and human destiny? Which is the less likely to be leavened with a grim and jealous exclusionism? Which is apparently the more in accordance with what science, in its every department, is yearly making known? Which invites and encourages the more free, wide-reaching, and fearless inquiry? Which the more enlarges the mind and expands the sympathies? Which gives the wider sweep and more noble realm to religion? I ask not which has the more terrors and the more raptures, and abounds the more in startling and agonizing and immediately telling effects. But which finds the more fit place in the grand, even if slow, quiet, gradual, but in the end far more beneficial, work of *educating* man, in the broadest and noblest sense of that word? Time is preparing the answer to these questions: I fearlessly anticipate its replies.



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## UNITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND DOCTRINES.

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“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” — ROMANS xiv. 4, 5.

THESE words of Paul to the Romans are suitable to preface a statement of the principles and doctrines of the Unitarian sect of Christians. Those who deny to this sect the name of Christian show only their want of acquaintance with its writing and its preaching. It is very easy to make the charge of “infidelity” against a religious body; but to intelligent minds those who make this charge only exhibit their own want of charity or knowledge. Men do not build churches, hold public worship, support ministers, and spend money in works which look exactly like Christian works, and are just what other churches do which call themselves Christians, while all the time they are infidels or atheists. There are some absurdities so patent that they refute themselves, and bring confusion upon their prophets; and to say that Unitarians, who have churches in America, and England, and France, and Holland, and Switzerland, and Germany, and Austria, and have had them for hundreds of years; who pray in Christ’s name, and sing hymns in his honor, and commend his example, and repeat his characteristic works, — to say that a sect of this kind is not “Christian,” is one of the absurdities that would be incredible, if men were not found foolish enough

to utter it. A similar utterance was that of those Pharisees who ventured to say that Jesus could not be God's prophet, because he did not keep the Sabbath day in their fashion. More sensible men at once answered them that the acts of the healer, and the words of the teacher, proved sufficiently that he was a prophet from God. There were "blind leaders of the blind" in Judea 1800 years ago, and there are blind leaders of the blind in our time. And there are no persons whom these words of Jesus more accurately describe than those who deny the Christian name to a religious body of whose ideas and principles they are ignorant, which they take no pains to know, and who only care to foster the illusion of those who know as little of it as themselves. Paul has words of this class of men, too, in that first letter of his to Timothy, where he speaks of persons "desiring to be teachers of the law: understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm."

There is no need of refuting a charge which refutes itself to a thoughtful mind from the facts which cannot be denied. But a simple statement of Unitarian principles and doctrines, which might be made throughout from the very words of Jesus, may show more clearly the folly of the charge so loosely brought. We separate the principles from the doctrines, since the first are the working force of a religious body, the second only its temporary, possibly its shifting, opinions. Every church must be judged by its principles, by its ideas, by the ideas which move it and give it power. Now, no church has principles more distinctly defined, more universally admitted, than the Unitarian Church. The Episcopal, or Presbyterian, or Baptist, or Methodist bodies cannot be surer of their ideas than the Unitarian. There are certain principles, on which all our churches, all our ministers, all our men and women, communicants and non-communicants, what-



ever their different notions about one or another dogma ;— certain principles, upon which all are agreed, which all in our body recognize and magnify.

1. The first of these principles is the grand Protestant principle of the *right of private judgment*. We hold to this in the fullest extent. We say that every man has a right to form his creed for himself, from his own investigation, thought, and conviction, and that no one has a right to hamper him in the process of finding this, or to dictate to him by authority what he shall believe ; that there shall be absolute and perfect freedom for all men in coming to religious truth as much as to any other truth. We say that no councils, no synods, no catechisms, no fathers of the church, no doctors of the church, no preachers, no editors, whether of the ancient time or the present time, have a right to lord it over the souls of men, or to say what they *must* or *must not* believe. Every man must settle that for himself. Catechisms, councils, wise men, may help him in his decision, but cannot decide for him beforehand. This is a principle which every Unitarian Church in this country or in Europe maintains with all positiveness, and from which no temptation could draw it away. Every Unitarian asserts the right of every man to think for himself in coming to his saving belief.

2. A second principle of the Unitarian Church is, *that no one can be required or expected to believe what is contrary to reason*, or what seems to be so ; that reason is the arbiter of truth, and that all truth is to be tested by reason. Unitarians hold that reason was given to man as his light and his guide, that this is the “logos” of which John speaks, and that the only faith which is good for any thing is that which reason accepts. All beyond this is profession, — phrases, but not truth ; of no use to any one. All Unitarians are rationalists in this sense, that they do not wish or intend to say that they believe any thing which

seems to them to be mathematically, metaphysically, or morally untrue, contrary to the accepted laws of science or of soul, — any thing which is absurd to the reason, or revolting to the conscience. They will not believe a mathematical falsehood, or a falsehood of any kind, though it may be called a mystery and pretend to be revealed by an angel. Every church in the body, every intelligent member in the body, holds to this principle, however high or deep their thought of God and Christ may be. We are all rationalists in vindicating reason as the ground of faith.

3. A third principle of the Unitarian Church is, that *no man is infallible*; that no creed can be framed that shall be beyond the reach of error, or that shall not be open to change; that no form of words or even of ideas can set forth the absolute truth as it is in the mind of God. The wisest men make mistakes, and they make mistakes in interpreting and deciding religious truth as much as in interpreting and deciding any other truth. There is no infallible teacher, there is no infallible church, and there never can be. A thousand men, or a million men, agreeing to say the same thing, do not make that thing true. A doctrine is not true because it has been repeated for a thousand years in thousands of churches. The Catholic Church is not infallible, in spite of its claim to own the Holy Spirit. The Protestant Church, in any branch, is not infallible, in spite of its claim of going by the letter of the Bible. There never was a saint or a prophet, since the church began, who could say that he was exempt from the possibility of error. All Unitarians hold to their principle. We have no infallible standard in the word of any man, or in the words of any set of men.

4. A fourth principle of the Unitarian Church is, that *no creed can contain the whole of religion*; that religion, religious faith, cannot possibly be summed up in the words

of a creed. No formula, however ingeniously phrased and arranged, can possibly contain all that the soul believes and feels about man and God and the relation between them. Religion is broader, deeper, higher than any creed can possibly be. A creed may attempt to tell what faith is, may tell some things which we believe, but it falls short of expressing all our belief even now, much less all that we may believe hereafter. It may have five articles or thirty-nine articles, or a hundred articles, and still be inadequate. It may be very simple or very complex, very clear or very obscure, and still fail to conclude all faith. Some Unitarians like creeds, while others do not; but all agree that a creed can never be a finality, never be fixed for all time, and for the substance of all faith, never stand as the barrier to all farther religious advance. There is not one Unitarian, anywhere, in any Unitarian Church, who sums up the religion of all men, or even his own religion, in the words of any creed.

5. A fifth principle of the Unitarian Church is, *that there can be, and that there ought to be, no uniformity of religious faith.* Differences of faith are inevitable. Men cannot all believe alike more than they can look alike or act alike. Their faith will vary with their temperament, with their education, with their habits of thought, with the influences around them. Some will be able to believe what others cannot possibly believe. Some will accept readily what others cannot be persuaded to accept. All attempt to establish one creed for the various branches of the church is preposterous. Sects and parties in religious things are as natural and as necessary as they are in secular things. And it is just as impossible to force unanimity upon the major points as upon the minor points of the creed. All men cannot be made to see God in exactly the same way, or to find salvation in exactly the same way, more than they can be made to take precisely the same



view of Baptism and the Sabbath. This principle of permitted and inevitable diversity of religious opinion is one which all Unitarians, whether of the right wing or the left wing, most strenuously maintain.

6. A sixth principle of the Unitarian Church is, that *sincere faith is the only true faith*; that a mere form of words or phrases does not express a man's faith, unless he knows what he is saying. A man's creed is not what he utters with the lips, but what he utters with the mind and heart; not what he repeats following the dictation of a priest, but what he repeats out of the motion of his own soul. His real belief is not his *professed* belief, but his *honest* belief, be this much or little, be this identical with, or different from, his professed belief. Every thing which one adds to his honest conviction is superfluous, however it may coincide with the dogmas of the church. It is a principle of all Unitarian Churches, that saving faith is not in form of sound words, but in the sense of clear ideas; that sincerity is the prime requisite in all religious statements and confessions. They will never ask a convert to say that he believes one jot or tittle more than he does sincerely believe, even if he may be kept out of the kingdom of heaven by the defects of his faith. Strict and perfect sincerity is the avenue by which they would send forth their confession of belief.

7. A seventh principle of the Unitarian Church is, that *character is better than profession of any kind*, and that profession without character is good for nothing. The character of a man tells what he really believes better than his words can tell this. The acts of a man, his general tone of thought and habits of life, are the expression of his real creed. We look for his belief at what he is, and not what he says he is. We ask for better proof than any declarations, specially made. The creed is written in the life, and the world reads it from the man's life. Every



article must be practically witnessed by the general tenor of the man's acts or words. This all Unitarians assert, whether they have a creed or not, that the creed is second to the life, and must never be made the evidence or the substitute for the righteousness of the man. They infer no man's Christianity from the ease and readiness with which he repeats the phrases of the catechism; but they look first at the work which he does, at what he shows himself to be, whether his life and acts have any resemblance to the acts and life of the Christ. That is first, last, and always their test of the Christian character.

These which we have mentioned, — the right of private judgment; reason as the arbiter of truth; that no man is infallible; that no creed can contain the whole of religion; that difference of faith is necessary and inevitable; that sincere faith is the only true faith; and that life and character prove real belief; — are *principles* admitted by all Unitarians. Turning from these to speak of *doctrines*, we have to say at the outset, that no person can pretend to tell more than the average faith of the body to which he belongs. The Unitarian Church have not, and they never will have, any authoritative creed, any series of articles of which one may say, "that is the creed of the sect," any thing which corresponds to the Augsburg Confession of the Lutherans, or to the Westminster Catechism of the Presbyterians, or to the Thirty-nine Articles of the English Church. One who attempts to tell the doctrines of the Unitarian body must gather these from his study of the books which have been published by leading writers, and from his general acquaintance with the men and women of the body. He can only speak from impressions, and he has no right to commit any one else to his opinion.

The first and highest doctrine of a religious system is the doctrine of *God*. If there is no doctrine of God, there can be no theology. What do Unitarians, in their average faith, believe of God?

1. They believe in the *existence* of God, and in his personal existence; that he is a personal being, with mind, will, feeling, and power, all infinite; that his attributes of infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite love, all inhere in a substance which is real. They do not attempt to show the form of this great person, to show the mode of this infinite existence, to show what kind of a being a self-existing being — who never was born and who can never die — is. They simply say that they believe that there is a God: they are not atheists.

2. Then, in the second place, they believe in God as the *Creator* of all the things which are in the universe, giving in the beginning the germ of all worlds, and establishing the laws of generation and development, by which the universe has become what it is; that what we seem to see, and what we call *matter*, existed originally in the Divine thought; that God is the author of all being, mediately, or immediately; that all things come from God, on earth or in heaven.

3. In the third place, Unitarians believe that God is a *just God*; in other words, that he *rules the world by laws* which are sure, unvarying, impartial, and universal; that there is nothing in the universe which is not subject to law; that spiritual processes are as much under the dominion of God's law as material processes, — every being, high and low; a grain of sand, or a planet in its orbit; the flowers of the morning faded at night, or the cedar of Lebanon with its thousand years; the meanest reptile and the greatest man; every thing that has being, is subject to a law which the Infinite Ruler keeps for it. They say that God's will is just, because it is according to law, and that when men have discovered the law of any being's life, they have found the Divine justice concerning it. The sternest Calvinist could not believe in the justice of God more absolutely than the Unitarians believe in it.

The laws of God are his decrees, and he has decrees for every thing that he has made. There are no exceptions to these laws; what seem to men the exceptions, are only the result of laws which they have not yet discovered. God is the Infinite and Supreme Ruler of all the things that are made.

4. In the fourth place, Unitarians believe that God is *a loving and tender Father*, having in infinite measure all that love for his creatures which earthly parents have for their children; that God's creatures are his children; that he loves them all, blesses them all, wills the best good of them all, and is never weary of loving them. This fatherly love is his providence for them, — general for all together, special for every one. Unitarians do not believe in any partial providence, any love or care which is for one family and not for another, one people and not for another, one race and not for another, one church and not for another, one age and not for another; — but in a providence which extends to all ages, all churches, all races, all peoples, all families, all men, and all creatures, special always, because always present and never wanting. The fullest idea of an ever-present, ever-active, ever-tender, ever-kind love of the Father of all creatures is the Unitarian idea of Providence. In their idea God can never be a *hating* God, can never cease to love and care for any of his children. His love is incomprehensible, only because it is so immense and infinite, so much beyond all human love.

5. And the name of the Unitarian body suggests another peculiarity of their belief concerning God, — *in his Unity*. They believe that he is *one*, not divided in his Deity, not dual, or triple, or quadruple, or centuple, but strictly *one*. They believe that he exists in one being, and one person, that all his manifestations are gathered and concentrated in this single personality. They speak



of him as one person in describing his work. They address him as one person when they pray to him. His being is single and singular. It is not the society of Gods of which Unitarians think when they think of God. They keep this conception of unity because it is simple, is rational, and best explains the work of Providence and Creation. They believe in the unity of God as distinguished from Pagan Polytheism, or from philosophical Trinities, such as those of India and Greece, and such as those of the church-creeds. They find it entirely possible to worship God the Father without having any other God to divide his worship. And in worshipping God the Father, they worship the God whom Jesus himself worshipped, and whom his word has taught them to worship.

This, then, is what the Unitarians believe of God: that he exists as a person; that he creates all things; that he is just, as he rules by law; that he loves, as an Infinite Father, all his children; and that he is one God, not divided in his essence. How his being is, what it is, what is his form, they do not know, they do not care to know. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. And they say of God, that no searching can find him out, and that all dictation of what he *must be* and what he *must do*, is foolish and irreverent. They affirm, as much as any sect, the mystery of the Godhead; only it is to them real mystery by its greatness and fulness, and not by its mathematical enigma. God is the eternal wonder of the human soul, so high, so vast, so complete in glory, that no thought can attain his being; — but he is in no sense the puzzle of the soul, vexing it continually by an existence which seems false and wrong, according to the laws of thought. The mystery of the Godhead in the Unitarian creed is not the part of God which lies nearest, but the outlying greatness which shades the farther circle, and is lost in the infinite distance.



Next to the doctrine of God, in a system of theology, is the doctrine of *Man*. What do Unitarians believe concerning Man?

1. They believe, in the first place, that in his physical nature man is *part of the orderly system of organic creations*. He makes one of the series of animated and organized beings. He has wants, instincts, desires, in common with other animals. He eats, drinks, sleeps, walks and runs, rises and rests, utters sounds, and communicates his feeling as beasts, birds, and insects do. The structure of his frame is not essentially different from the structure of other animal frames. It has the same proportion and adjustment of bone, and nerve, and muscle, of heart and brain. Man is animal, is born as animals are born, dies as animals die, in bodily organization, has the same limitations to his physical being. His spiritual nature exempts him from none of the physical laws. He is as much under these laws, subject to physical conditions, as the humblest creature of God. Anywhere on the earth, man has his place and his share in the physical order of the earth. Physically, he is not more wonderfully made than any plant or crystal.

2. But Unitarians believe, in the next place, that man is *at the head* of this series, is the highest and most important of all the visible works of God's hand. They believe in the dignity of his nature, that he is, and was meant to be, Lord of Creation, the master of the forces of the world, and of the lives below him; that he has larger powers, finer feeling, quicker perception, greater range of action, than any of the other beings with which he stands in line; that there is nothing above him in this world, and that the imagination can conceive nothing of which his nature is not capable. They believe that man has an intelligence more perfect, a will more energetic, than any brute beast; that he has, in short, a nature more spiritual than any, —

that man has *a soul*. Concerning the nature of that soul, they hold differing opinions. There is no uniform Unitarian psychology, as there is no uniform orthodox psychology. But upon the fact that man has a soul, they are generally agreed. The spiritual worth and dignity of the human soul is more insisted upon in the writings of the Unitarians than in the writings of any religious sect.

3. And then Unitarians believe that this spiritual dignity is *a possibility of the whole human race*, and is not the property or prerogative of any particular portion of the race. They are far from maintaining that all men are actually equal, in the life that they have, but they maintain that all men are potentially equal, in what they may become, and that they have the same spiritual rights. They have all the same Father, no matter where they are born, under what sky, in what corner of the earth, to what custom of life, to what kind of influence. The savage is a man, and has the rights of a man. The negro is a man, and has the rights of a man. The idolater is a man as much as the Christian. Woman is human, and human rights are hers. Unitarians have no dogma about the first human pair, or the first creation of the race; where it was; in Asia or America; when it was, six thousand years ago, or six hundred thousand years ago; in one pair or in one hundred pairs, or by development from lower races; but they believe in the unity of the human race, as men everywhere have moral sense and religious sense, and may be educated to a spiritual life and into a kingdom of heaven. All men are spiritually children of God.

4. Yet, on the other hand, Unitarians believe in the *actual imperfection of men*. None, anywhere, are as good as they might be, as good as they ought to be. All men are *sinners*, to use the common word, because they transgress laws which are appointed for their physical and spiritual welfare. This transgression is sometimes volun-

tary and deliberate; men know that they are transgressing. Oftener it is involuntary, and is discovered only by the penalty which it brings. Unitarians say that even the best man, who is most careful of his heart and way, is not perfect; that he does, or says, or thinks what is not best, that he makes mistakes, that he violates law. There is no one who is in all things wholly righteous. On the fact of sin, Unitarians have a doctrine as positive as the doctrine of any sect. All men are sinners, all women are sinners, all children even, are sinners, in the sense that they do what they ought not to do, and leave undone the things which they ought to do. All who violate the laws of their being commit sin, and will be punished for that sin; the smallest or the greatest violation of law has its inevitable penalty.

The condition of man as a sinner, as a transgressor of law, makes it necessary to have a doctrine concerning Deliverance from Sin, — concerning what, in the ecclesiastical dialect, is termed “Salvation.” What is the Unitarian doctrine of Salvation?

1. Unitarians believe that salvation is *deliverance from sin itself*, — from its influence, its mastery, its inner force and outer force. They do not expect or ask for deliverance from the penalties of sins committed, or from the penalties of sin while the sins themselves are retained. They believe that the only way of escaping the punishment of sins is to get rid of the sins themselves. They do not believe in sin as an abstraction, but in sins as realities. The best way, and the only way, of getting rid of sin is by dealing with sins as realities, as things, and not as an influence in things. Deliverance from sin is wrought by rectifying the sources of transgression, by substituting right principles for wrong principles, right affections for wrong affections, a right direction of life for a wrong direction of life, by getting temptations out of the way, by purifying passions and appetites.



Unitarians believe that *the method of salvation varies* in the case of different persons. Where men are conscious of any violation of law, the first step must be repentance and a resolution to change from such violation. Where they are not conscious of such violation of law, the evil must be remedied by better surrounding influences and better education. The ordinary means of saving men from sins are training them from childhood in the way of virtue, giving them good precepts and good examples, encouraging all that is pure and righteous in their conduct and conversation, keeping around them an atmosphere of purity, removing all that imbrutes and debases. As so much of the sin of men comes from the circumstances of men, — their mode of life, their society, the influences around them, — they will be saved by setting these circumstances right, by making them more comfortable. As so much of sin comes from disorder in the physical frame, salvation comes in sanitary reforms, in better air, more light, more exercise, more physical health. Unitarians believe that men are saved by the application of the remedy exactly to the need; not by any arbitrary and artificial scheme which is the same for all, and has no connection with the special offence, but by the remedy that belongs to the disease. They would not deliver one person from melancholy by the same process which is to deliver another from drunkenness. They would not save one person from jealousy as another is saved from the habit of stealing. The salvation must be adapted to the offence, whatever that offence may be. Salvation has its difference in degree as well as its difference in kind. A great deal more of it is needed in some cases than is needed in other cases. Those who are spiritually wise need very little of it; those who are spiritually blind and ignorant need a great deal of it. It is much more difficult in some cases than in other cases; more difficult when the sin is of



habit and temperament than when it is of sudden temptation, and not natural; more difficult when it is bound up with interests and passions than when it stands aside from the daily course of life. There are some occupations and positions in life in which deliverance from sin is extremely improbable, some callings in which life seems only possible through continued sin.

Unitarians believe in change of heart, where the emotion and direction of the heart need to be changed, but the saving change in their theology means always *a change of life and action*; a coming back from violation of law to obedience to law. Salvation is the reconciliation of the life to the laws of God, the restoration of the transgressor to obedience. In this work all the change is in the life, spirit, and purpose of men; there is no change in the Divine Father or in his laws. God does not repent; only man repents. God does not alter his work or his counsels; only man changes his work and his counsel. Unitarians do not believe in any *transaction* between God and man in this matter of salvation, or any scheme by which Divine attributes are adjusted in a work which is wholly the concern of the creature. Change of heart and life does not merely guarantee salvation, not merely win this, — *it is* salvation. The salvation comes *in* the obedience to law, not merely *after* the obedience to law. Unitarians believe in future salvation as identical with present salvation; and hold that the only real salvation is present salvation. A man is saved in the spiritual world as he is saved in the natural world, — by obedience to the laws of his being.

The most important influence in this deliverance of the soul and life of man from sin is the *Christian religion*. This saves men in most civilized lands; though Unitarians believe, too, that heathen religions have saving qualities, and that the Chinese are saved from sin by the teachings

of Confucius, the Persians by the teachings of Zoroaster; that men are made better by the moral truths even of idolatrous faiths. But they believe that the best of all religions — the religion which gives the highest, broadest, and most spiritual salvation — is the religion which holds the name of Christ. They accept Christ as the Saviour of those who become his disciples, and know his Gospel; and as indirectly the Saviour of many who are not called by his name, and are not conscious that they know his Gospel. The average Unitarian faith exalts the salvation which is from Christ, and gives it all the practical force which it has in any creed. No epithets of honor are too strong to describe this great salvation.

But the Unitarian idea of this salvation is not that it is mystical, unnatural, outside of the ordinary ways of influences, but strictly according to the natural way of influence. Christ saves men by his *teaching*, by telling them what is just, pure, good, true, noble, and divine, by giving them good instruction, by giving them right moral and religious ideas. He is the great teacher, whose words are wiser than those of prophets and sages. Christ saves men by his *example*; showing in his own conduct and conversation, as we read his biographies, what way of life, what kind of intercourse, makes men happy, and gives a clear conscience and the sense of God's nearness. Christ saves by *the spirit of his work*, which was in healing and blessing men. Christ saves by his *fortitude in suffering*, instanced in many ways, but especially by his death upon the Cross; which is, moreover, the supreme sign of self-devotion and sacrifice. Christ saves, as he shows in his word and his act, in his life and death, the incarnation of the Divine spirit, — the *life of a Divine Man*. In speaking and thinking of the salvation of Christ, Unitarians do not separate the human from the Divine in his nature, or one part of his life from another. Men are not saved by

his miraculous birth, or by his miraculous death, or by any thing in his history that is apart from practical adaptation to the human soul. Men are saved by forming his life within their lives, by becoming like him in spirit, in purpose, in virtue, and in faith, by the whole of his life, and by the general influence of his work. They are saved by the Christianity which has *got into the customs of society*, which has been fixed in the statutes and laws, which has entered into the relations of life, of business, of the State, or of the Church. Among Unitarians there are various views of the nature and the being of Jesus of Nazareth. Some think that he was different by constitution from all other men, with no human father; while others think that he was what his own Apostles supposed him to be, the son of Joseph the carpenter, and that he had brothers and sisters, as the narrative says. Some think that he lived in an angelic state before he was born, while others give to him no more pre-existence than to any man. Some think that his rising from the dead was in the flesh with which he died, while others think, like the women at the sepulchre, that it was a spirit which appeared in the form of man. But whatever these differing views about the kind and degree of the humanity of Jesus, all Unitarians believe that he saves men by natural influence on their hearts and lives, as he teaches them, shows them their sin, inspires them to seek better things, and demonstrates to them the kingdom of God, the man of God, and the life of God. All Unitarians find this sufficient, without any scheme or contrivance by which God has to appease his own wrath in the slaughter of an innocent person for the sins of a guilty world. In the Unitarian phrase, the word "atonement" always means, as it meant in the one place where it is used in the New Testament, — *reconciliation*; and that reconciliation is in bringing the souls of men to sympathy with God and his



laws. The Unitarian Christology is of one who prepares the souls of men to be the dwelling-place of God's spirit, of a mediator who gives to the soul the message and the substance of the life of God; who showed in a simple human life of compassion, love, and faithfulness, the visible inspiration of God.

And this leads us to say that Unitarians believe that there is a special influence of the spirit of God upon the souls of men. They believe that men are inspired, are quickened, are enlightened and energized by this divine influence; that it is in the word of prophets and in the acts of saints. They believe that there was inspiration in the ancient time, and that there is inspiration in the modern time; that there is a faith in spiritual things, a sight of spiritual truths, which is not the result of investigation, or of logical process, but which is given directly, which comes in conscious communion with God. They believe that *prayer* is the natural and the effectual method of this communion with God, that the Divine Spirit always comes near to the souls of men when they pray sincerely, when they pour out their souls in petition for spiritual gifts, or recognize the providence and love of a living God. Unitarians use prayer, and believe in it, though they attach to it no superstitious ideas, and do not think that its influence is in any sense supernatural. They believe in prayer as wholly according to the spiritual law; as the necessary way of gaining graces of the soul, and of holding conscious intercourse with God. They have not all the same philosophy of its working. Some think that it may move the mind of God, while others see its effective work in the minds and hearts of men. But all confess that it has its place in the way of the spiritual life, and that inspiration comes through prayer.

Unitarians believe, as really as Evangelical sects in their prayer meetings, that men may be and ought to be in-



spired to-day as truly as in any former day; as really, too, as Roman Catholics, that inspiration ought to be, and that it is, in the Christian Church. They have a very positive doctrine concerning *the Church*. They say that the Church is the spiritual union and fellowship of all Christian men and women, of all men and women who have the spirit of Christ in their hearts and are trying to do his work; that it is not to be fastened in any sectarian enclosure, or described by any sectarian name; that no denomination of Christians has a right to call itself "*the*" Church, exclusive of other denominations; that all righteous and God-fearing men and women, who are trying to realize the kingdom and justice of God, as revealed by Christ, are in the Church, members of the Church, whether they belong to any particular Church or not, whether or not they have taken any sectarian name; that the Holy Spirit admits men to the Church, and not the laying on of a priest's hands or the uttering of a few phrases; that a great many persons are in the Church who have never confessed their faith before men, and have never gone through any process of conversion that they have known. Unitarians believe in the "Holy Catholic Church" in the largest sense of that phrase, not as meaning Roman Catholic, or Anglo-Catholic, or Presbyterian Catholic, or Catholic with any local or sectarian prefix, but as meaning the whole company of those who have been influenced by the great salvation. The Church is as wide as the world and as wide as the presence of the Lord. They believe, as Paul believed, that even a multitude of the heathen, without knowing it, are in the Church of Christ; that the only Church which Christ formed, or intended to form, was this spiritual Church, which knew no distinction of name, and had no rejection of any who might wish to come into it. Unitarians do not believe in a Church which bars or bolts its doors to any that wish to come in, or which sets

in the gateway any barrier or test of human opinion or human creed. They believe in a free Church, not in a fenced Church, in a Church which is recruited always and is never full.

Unitarians have no doctrine of Sacraments, except as all obligations, all solemn promises, are sacraments. Baptism they call a sacrament, as it is a pledge of a man or woman for themselves, or for their children, that they will try to realize the righteousness of God in their own lives, or in the lives of their children. Unitarians have no holy-water, and pray when they baptize that the man may consecrate himself or his children by that *sign* of purification. The external act is only a sign, and they regard the manner of administration as of no importance, whether it is by touching the forehead or plunging the body. Marriage is a sacrament, as it is the promise of two souls to keep spiritual union, and to be faithful to one another in the most momentous of earthly relations. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, as it renews from time to time the promise of brotherly love. Unitarians attach no superstitious ideas to this so-called rite. It is not to them a repetition of the tragedy of Calvary, or a peculiar privilege of men initiated into a secret society, or a reward of religious merit; — in no sense an awful mystery. It is simply a memorial feast, calling to mind the last supper of Jesus and his disciples, and signifying the relation which the disciples of Jesus always bear to one another. Some Unitarians attach more importance to this memorial than others, but all agree in making it a *means* of religion, and not in any sense an end. None that I know would keep any person away from the Lord's table who may wish to come there, whatever his name, his profession, or his character. Unitarians believe that the communion of the Lord's Supper ought to be always free, as it was free in the beginning, and they have no measure of fitness for it. They make

their invitation to it as broad as was the invitation of Paul and Timothy. The Lord's Supper which they believe in is not the Mass of the Catholic Church, or the solemn symbol of the Evangelical elect, separated from the world, but the memorial feast as they find it in the Scriptures of the New Testament.

Unitarians take the books of the Bible as the record of the teaching of God to the Jewish people and to the early Christians through their wise men and their prophets. Their doctrine of the Bible is, that it is a collection of books on various subjects, — historical, biographical, poetical, and moral, of various value, but mostly with a religious bearing and purpose. The inspiration which they find in the Bible is an inspiration of the men whose story is told, not an inspiration of the words and letters. The Old Testament is the literature of the Jewish people; the New Testament is the early Christian literature. Unitarians prize the Bible as much as any sect; use it in their churches, use it in their homes, gladly assist in its circulation; but they do not make an idol of this sacred book, and worship its name. They prize it for the ideas which it holds, and the truth that it contains, and do not make more of it than it really is, or contend that it is what it never claims to be. To them the Bible is in the words of men, — Hebrew and Greek, Latin and English; and it has the characteristics of human thought and speech, even while it tells the will of God.

And the Unitarian doctrine of the Sacred Day is that it is the *Lord's Day*, which preserves in memory that great event in the life of Christ which took away from his followers the fear of death. They do not think of this day as the Jewish Sabbath, loaded with prohibitions, a day on which it is sinful to walk or ride, to laugh or to be joyful, but as a day for the exercise of all the best and freest natural affections. It is no more sacred in itself than any



other days of the week, and has no moral code peculiar to itself. The Unitarian doctrine is that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; that there is no more reason for wearing sad countenances when men worship together than when they work together. The dignity of the day comes in the spiritual quickening which it gives; in its associations with what is beautiful, and pure, and friendly, and fraternal; in its separating men from selfish cares and joining them in common prayers for mutual good; in giving them experience of the heavenly life, which is the immortal life. On the Lord's day, men feel their true life, and they have this more abundantly.

And the Unitarian doctrine of death is, that it is *only a change in the condition of life*, not an extinction of life itself. It has no power to destroy the soul, but all its work is in taking vitality from the bodily frame, and leaving the parts of this to dissolve and enter into new material forms. The soul, the living spirit of the man, unclothed from its mortal part, assumes now a spiritual body, suited to a new world and new needs of life. The philosophy of the spiritual world is not uniform with Unitarian believers. Some have it nicely drawn out, and can make pictures of it, while with others it lies vague and undefined. But all that I know agree in rejecting the crude notion of the resurrection of the physical body, and in denying any necessary union between the soul and body after death has parted them. Most Unitarians believe in the recognition of departed friends, that souls which have been joined on earth in love will still keep union in the spiritual world; that in the disembodied world there are near societies, families and kindreds, though the physical ties exist no longer. There are some who think and speak of Heaven as a place; but the faith of the wisest treats Heaven as a state, which may be as real on the earth as beyond the earth.



In regard to rewards and punishments in the future life, Unitarians have no doctrine separate from their general doctrine of law and its violations. They believe that all good deeds have their inevitable reward, cannot fail to bring the happiness and peace which they deserve, but that the thought or expectation of personal happiness, here or hereafter, is *not the proper motive of Christian virtue*. Men should do good, because that is right, because that is the will of God, not because it will give them some individual blessing. So they believe that every sin has its penalty which cannot be escaped, and that the spiritual penalty of sin will endure as long as the sin lasts, and until it shall have wrought its due and needful reformation. How long in time this will be, they cannot tell; but they believe that God's counsel will not fail through man's transgression, and that it is the Lord's will that not one of his rational creatures should utterly and for ever perish. They expect, in the consummation of all things, the universal reign of the Lord.

This is a rapid and concise statement of the average Unitarian opinion upon the principal points of religious doctrine. Unitarians claim that these views are rational, and can be maintained without doing violence to reason; that they are Scriptural, and can be justified from the spirit and from the letter of the Christian record, rightly read; that they are agreeable to the best instincts of the soul; that they are harmonious with the science of nature, and with the needs of human life; that children can understand them, and that the mature mind does not outgrow them; that they are good to live by, and that they are good to die by. This system of doctrine has satisfied, and still satisfies, the wisest men and the best men; men who are honored, trusted, and loved; men who are listened to respectfully, and are followed by the praise and reverence of the whole community. Three of the American

Presidents have been members of the Unitarian Church, and two others have given this faith in substance as their creed. Of Judges, Governors, Senators, Congressmen, elected by votes of the Evangelical sects, who have professed this faith, the list would be a very long one. The most distinguished of the writers of the country, in history, in poetry, in philosophy, in art, are nearly all Unitarians. The ablest public speakers find inspiration in these views of God and man. So far as great names lend credit to any doctrine, this Unitarian doctrine certainly has it. But it has in quite as large measure the better credit of noble and beautiful lives, of saintly men and women, who rise, a cloud of witnesses, to tell what it has done for them. The worst bigot in Massachusetts would not dare to call Governor Andrew an "infidel," though he was as faithful to care for his Sunday-school class in the Unitarian Church of the Disciples as for the wounded in the hospitals and the soldiers in the field. No faith has ever been more ready to prove itself by works of love and mercy than this faith. If it has not sent many missionaries to fight against idolatry in heathen lands, and substitute for this idolatry the creeds of Augustine or Calvin, it has sent far more than its proportion of missionaries into the waste places at home, into the haunts of wickedness, to convert the blind, and the erring, and the sinful. No one can deny that Unitarian Christianity makes ministers of practical righteousness.

Unitarians are not indifferent to the good-will of the Christians around them. They do not like to be misrepresented, or to be treated as outlaws, even by ignorant and bigoted men. But they can stand alone, and are not to be driven from their position by any slanders. They will hold fast to what they believe to be truth, even if they are denounced as unbelievers, or are denied a place in the great salvation. They want no Heaven which is won by

compromise or hypocrisy; and they will lose the society of men whom they respect rather than be false to the word of God as it is spoken to their souls. They hold their doctrine not as a finality or a perpetually binding creed, but as ready always to revise and improve it, as the spirit of God shall give them more light and knowledge. They own no master but the great Teacher, the great source of spiritual wisdom, and they are content to abide his judgment. They ask no triumph or success, but the triumph which truth shall give them, as shown in the logic of their argument, and as shown in the lives of their confessors.

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